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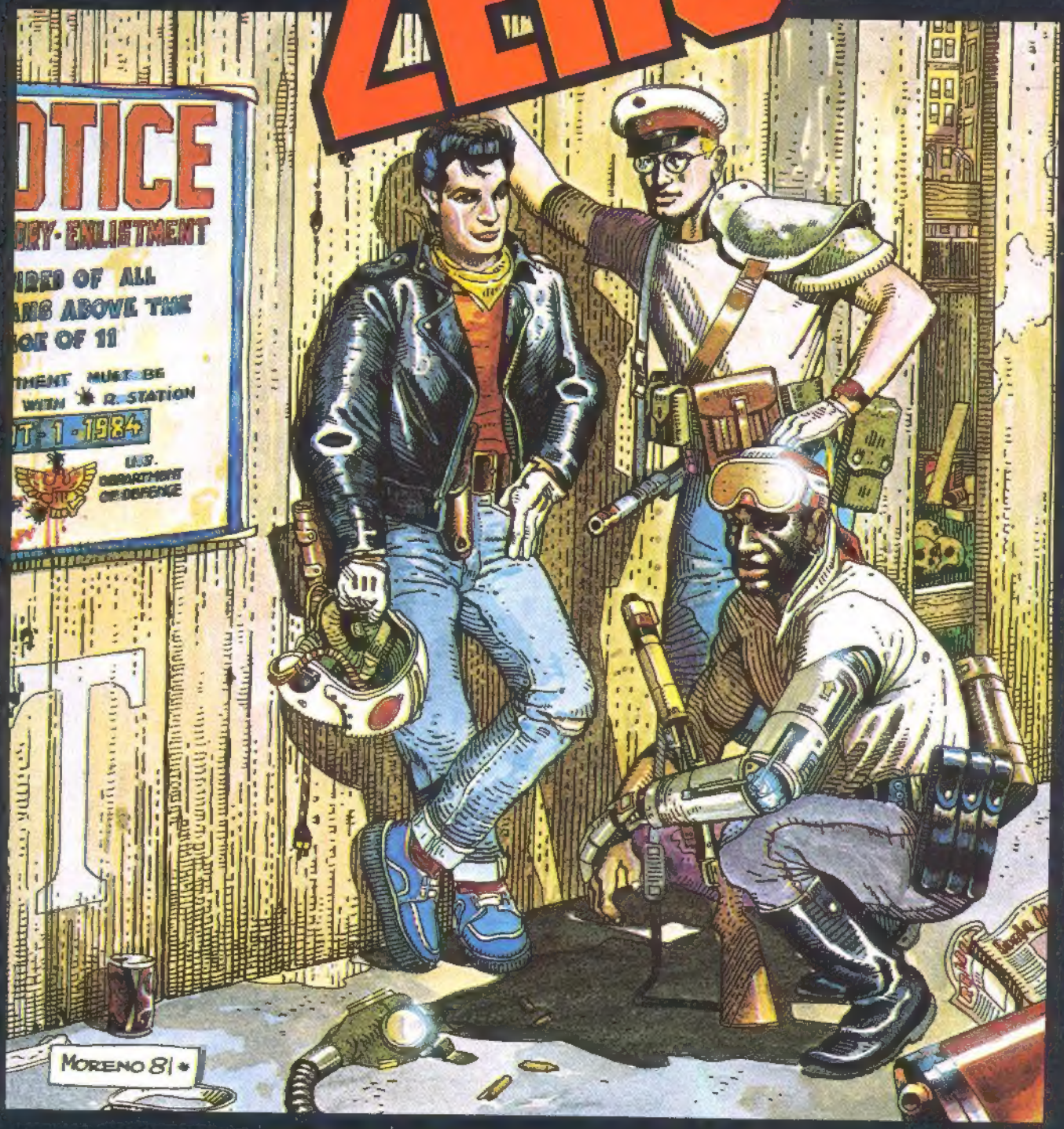
epic™ ILLUSTRATED

this issue:
an all-new series
GENERATION ZERO
by Pepé Moreno
plus:
WANDERER
by Mike Kaluta

also:
the conclusion of
ABRAXAS & THE EARTHMAN
by Rick Veitch

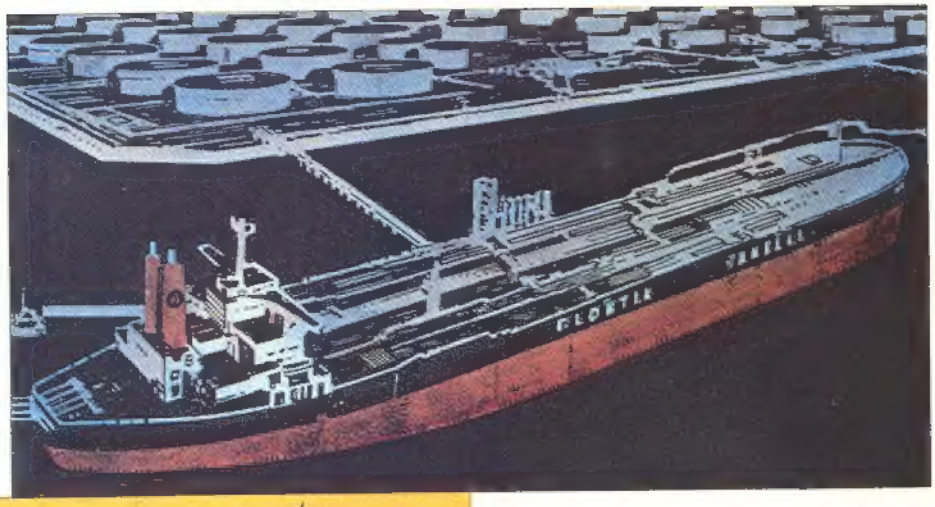
GENERATION ZERO



THE CHESS GAME

THE STORY IS, OF COURSE, ONLY TOO TRAGICALLY FAMILIAR TO US ALL. YET IT MUST NEVER BE FORGOTTEN, AND WHAT BETTER TIME TO RECALL THAT TERRIBLE CHAIN OF EVENTS THAN THE OCCASION NOW BEFORE US?

REMEMBER? THE BLINDNESS TO THE EXPLOITATION AND WASTE OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES... THE PAINFUL AWAKENING THAT ALL THOSE THINGS, SUCH AS THE WORLD'S OIL RESERVES, WHICH ONCE SEEMED AN ENDLESS BOUNTY WERE NOW DESPERATELY DWINDLING...



... AND EVERY NATION STRUGGLED TO CONTROL A SHARE OF THAT WHICH REMAINED.

THE MIDDLE-EAST, ALWAYS A TINDER BOX, SAW ITS MOST VIOLENT ERUPTIONS EVER. MOSLEM, CHRISTIAN AND JEW CLASHED IN WHAT BECAME A VIRTUAL HOLY WAR.

AND BAD THOUGH IT WAS, IT WAS ONLY ONE AMONG MANY...

... AS THESE LIMITED, LOCALIZED CONFLICTS FLARED EVERYWHERE.

SOUTH AFRICA. CENTRAL AMERICA. THE ORIENT. ALL OVER THE GLOBE THERE WAS THE THUNDER OF WAR MACHINES, THE DREADFUL LIGHTNING OF BOMBS AND MISSILES.

BUT EVEN AS THEY FOUGHT IN THEIR OWN INTERESTS, EACH COUNTRY WAS INEVITABLY PAWN IN A LARGER GAME...

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... PLAYED BY SUPER POWERS.

TOO FEARFUL TO OPENLY CONFRONT ONE ANOTHER, TOO MISTRUSTFUL TO EVER REACH A TOTAL PEACE, THEY SUPPORTED THE SMALLER CONFLICTS, USING THEM TO TEST AND CHALLENGE THE OPPOSITION'S MIGHT AND INFLUENCE...

... ALL THE WHILE VERBALLY ATTACKING THE OTHER'S ROLE IN DOING SO.

PRESSURES INCREASED. THE TENSIONS GREW. AN ALL-OUT ARMS RACE, UNRELIEVED BY ATTEMPTS AT SETTLEMENT OR REASONING OF DIFFERENCES, DEVELOPED...

... WIDENING FROM THE SUPER POWERS TO THEIR SATELLITES AND ALLIES AND BEYOND.

NOTHING TOOK PRECEDENT OVER MILITARY BUILD-UP. THE WORLD WAS A CHESSBOARD WITH MORE AND MORE PIECES BEING BROUGHT INTO PLAY...

...BUT EACH NATION, LARGE AND SMALL, SUPER POWER OR MINOR, PAID A PRICE.

GREATER AND GREATER PERCENTAGES OF NATIONAL BUDGETS WERE EATEN AWAY BY DEFENSE AND SECURITY. HUGE ARMIES MARCHED, BUT THE HOMELANDS THEY FOUGHT FOR WERE TORN BY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHAOS.

ANY NOT SERVING THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX SUFFERED. HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE PROGRAMS VANISHED. POVERTY AND CRIME REACHED ASTRONOMICAL LEVELS CLASS AND RACIAL STRIFE BECAME COMMONPLACE. ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION RAGED OUT OF CONTROL.

THOSE STILL POSSESSING WEALTH OR AUTHORITY HIRED THEIR OWN MERCENARY FORCES FOR PROTECTION...

...OR LOBBIED FOR GOVERNMENT TROOPS TO ACT ON THEIR BEHALF.

THOSE WHO POSSESSED NEITHER WERE LEFT TO PROTEST... BEFORE A RISING TIDE OF PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL REPRESSION.

SHADOWS OF WAR WITHOUT, STEADY DECAY WITHIN. ANY WHO HAD EYES COULD SEE WHAT WAS COMING, YET SO *MANY* WERE BLIND!

THE CENTURY WAS INTO ITS LAST DECADES. AND EARTH, THE EARTH WE ALL STILL REMEMBER, WAS IN ITS FINAL HOURS.

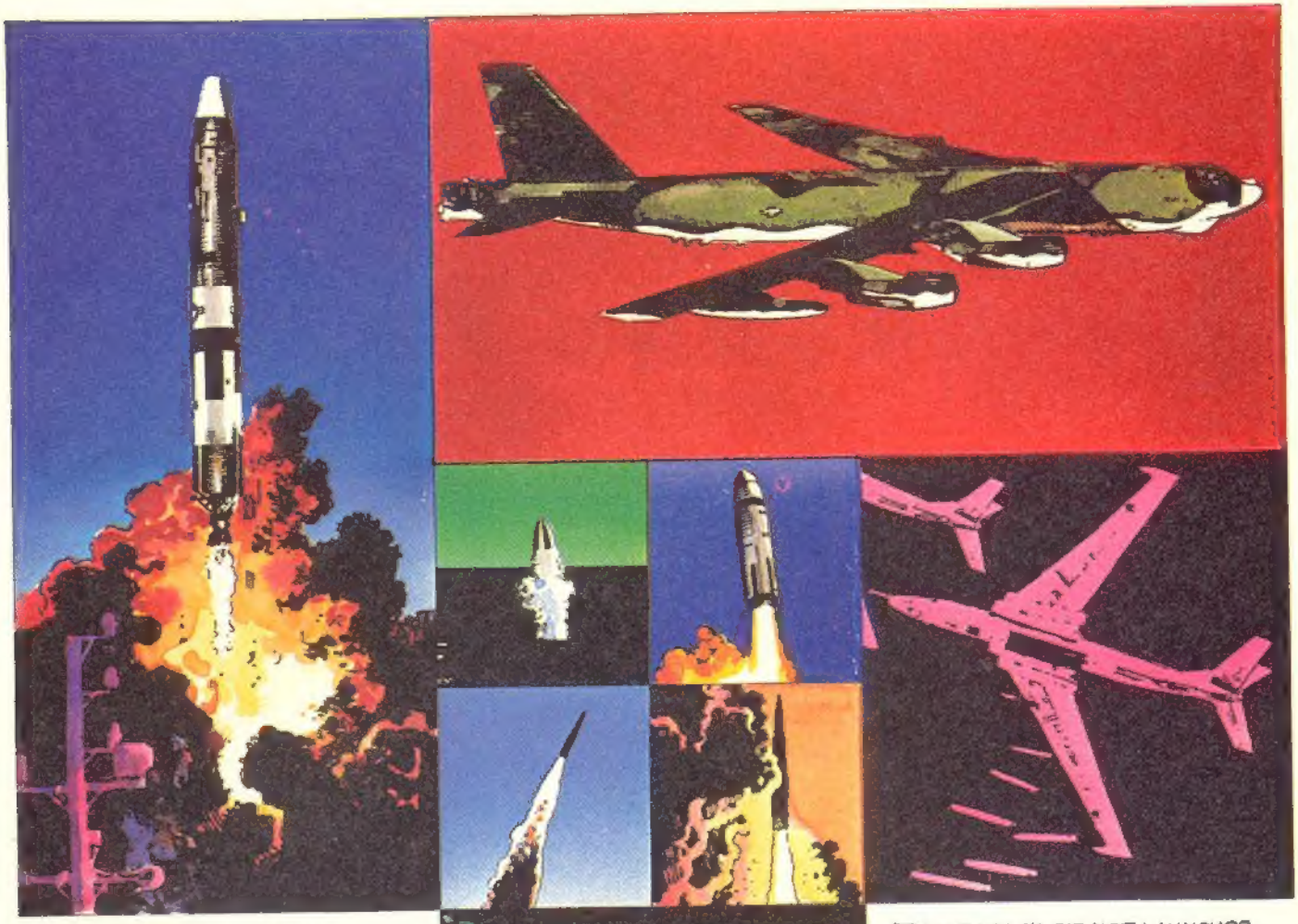
PERHAPS, IF THE SHINY PIECES ON THE CHESSBOARD HADN'T BEEN POISED SO EAGERLY FOR SO LONG, IT COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED. MORE LIKELY, GIVEN THE WORLD TURMOIL, THE GLOBAL CHAOS...

...IT WOULD MERELY HAVE BEEN POSTPONED.

COMPUTER MALFUNCTION.

AN ELECTRONIC CHIP SMALLER THAN A COIN, WORTH FAR LESS THAN A DOLLAR, MISINTERPRETS A SIGNAL. AN ALERT IS CALLED... AND DETECTED BY THE OPPOSITE SIDE. A COUNTER-STRIKE IS ORDERED.

DETECTION. REACTION. STEP BY STEP. IT TOOK ONLY MOMENTS. THE BRINK WAS REACHED. AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, PASSED.

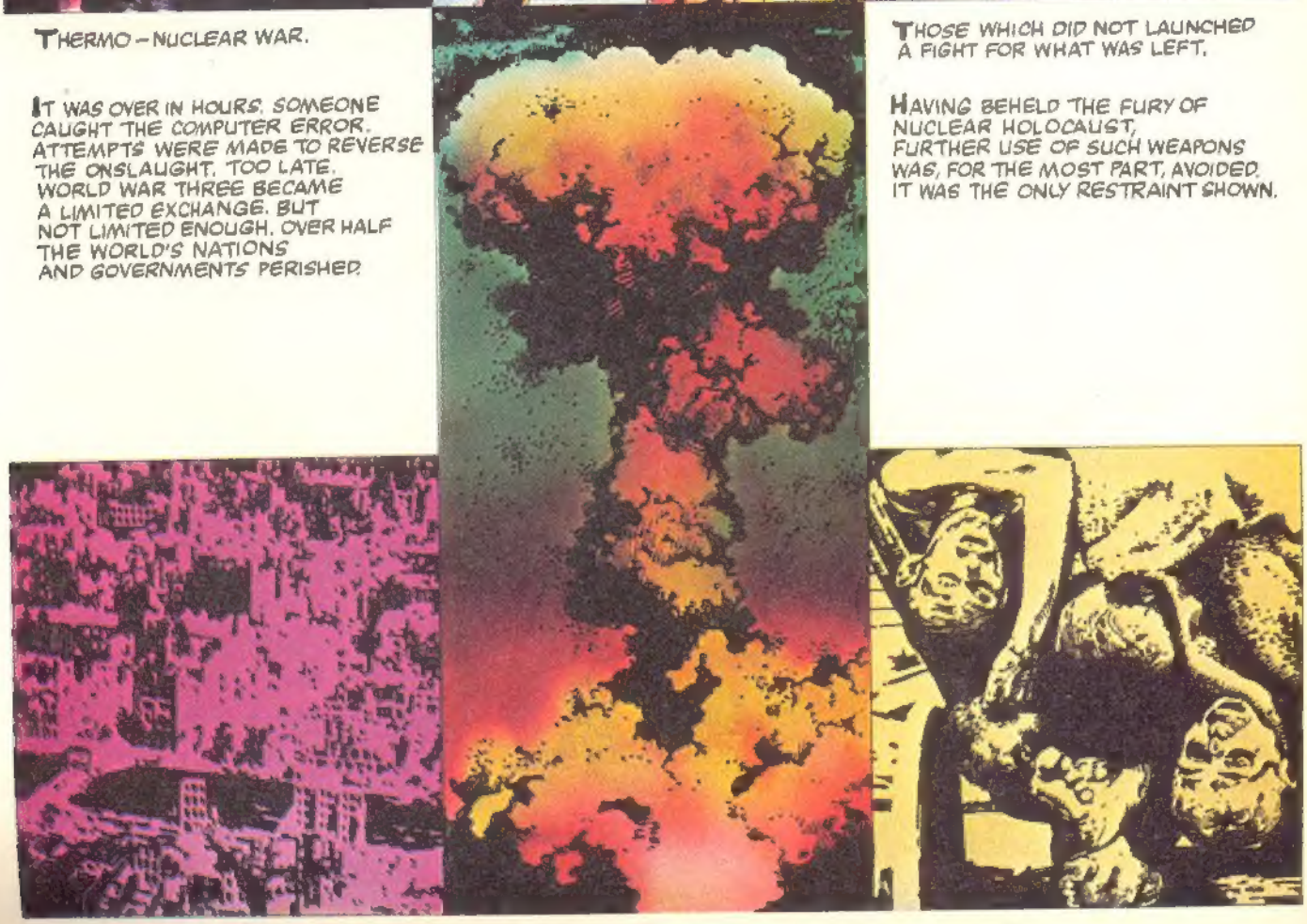


THERMO-NUCLEAR WAR.

IT WAS OVER IN HOURS. SOMEONE CAUGHT THE COMPUTER ERROR. ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO REVERSE THE ONSLAUGHT. TOO LATE. WORLD WAR THREE BECAME A LIMITED EXCHANGE. BUT NOT LIMITED ENOUGH. OVER HALF THE WORLD'S NATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS PERISHED.

THOSE WHICH DID NOT LAUNCHED A FIGHT FOR WHAT WAS LEFT.

HAVING BEHELD THE FURY OF NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST, FURTHER USE OF SUCH WEAPONS WAS, FOR THE MOST PART, AVOIDED. IT WAS THE ONLY RESTRAINT SHOWN.



SOCIETY ON EARTH, MOST OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION, DIED.

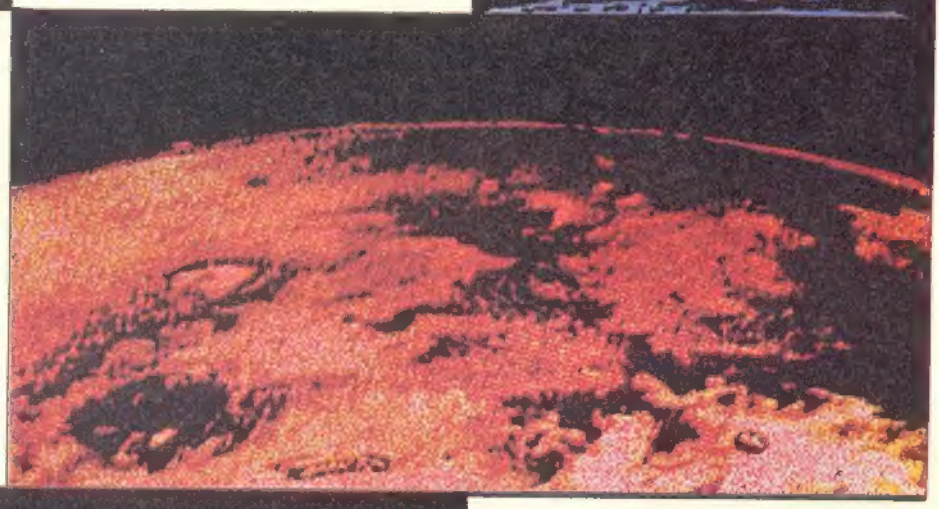
WE CAN'T BE CERTAIN WHAT, IF ANYTHING, HAS RISEN IN ITS PLACE. WE KNOW PEOPLE SURVIVED. BUT HOW MANY? UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES?

THERE ARE VAST REGIONS RENDERED TOTALLY UNLIVEABLE EVEN NOW, AFTER ALL THIS TIME.

YET, BECAUSE THE NUCLEAR EXCHANGE WAS PARTIALLY LIMITED, THERE MUST BE POCKETS AT LEAST WHICH WENT UNSCATHED. BUT ANY SUCH AREAS STILL HAVE MUCH TO CONTEND WITH.

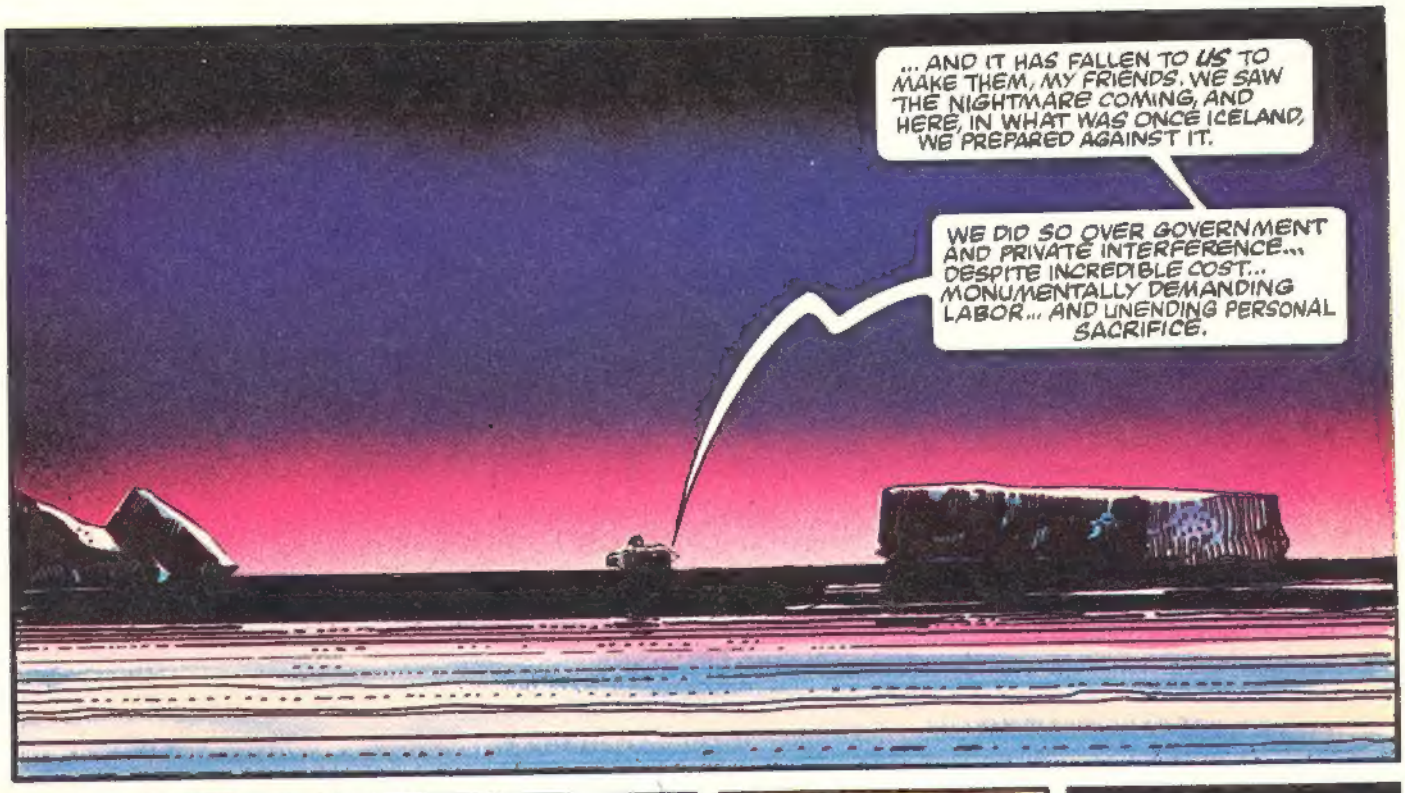
NOTHING IS THE SAME. WEATHER, CLIMATE, AND SEASONS HAVE BEEN PERMANENTLY, SOMETIMES VIOLENTLY, ALTERED.

AND THE SKY...! IN MANY PLACES THE SKY IS STILL CLOTTED WITH RADIOACTIVE CLOUDS, RED AND ROILING. SWOLLEN WITH CONTAMINATION.



FOR ALL THAT, THE EARTH IS RESILIENT. MORE SO THAN WE CREDITED. MORE SO PERHAPS, THAN WE DESERVE. THE LAST TWO YEARS, SIGNS OF HEALING, OF REVIVAL, HAVE GROWN.

THE PAST IS DEAD. THE CHESS-BOARD HAS BEEN SWEPT CLEAN OF THE OLD PLAYERS. IT IS A NEW WORLD, A TIME FOR NEW BEGINNINGS...


... AND IT HAS FALLEN TO *US* TO MAKE THEM, MY FRIENDS. WE SAW THE NIGHTMARE COMING, AND HERE, IN WHAT WAS ONCE ICELAND, WE PREPARED AGAINST IT.
WE DID SO OVER GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE INTERFERENCE... DESPITE INCREDIBLE COST... MONUMENTALLY DEMANDING LABOR... AND UNENDING PERSONAL SACRIFICE.

REASONABLY, RATIONALLY, WE PULLED TOGETHER AS AN INSANE WORLD WAS COMING APART.

WE SURVIVED AND WE GATHERED OTHER SURVIVORS TO US. THROUGH CAREFUL CONTROL AND SENSIBLE RESTRICTION...

... WE'VE CREATED A SELF-CONTAINED AND PEACEFULLY FUNCTIONING SOCIETY. BUT WE CAN'T BE SURE WHAT *OTHERS* HAVE DONE.
9

COMMUNICATIONS FROM OUTSIDE HAVE BEEN SPORADIC... OUR FEW ATTEMPTS AT PERSONAL RECON-NAISANCE, DISASTER... UNTIL *TODAY*.
REFUGEE COUNCIL

THE SHIFTING AND SHRINKING OF THESE RADIOACTIVE CLOUD ZONES HAVE MADE POSSIBLE A TREMENDOUS BREAKTHROUGH... A SPECIAL PROJECT OF MINE SINCE BECOMING PRESIDENT OF THIS COUNCIL.
WE'VE RE-ESTABLISHED LINKAGE WITH A COMMUNICATIONS SATELLITE. WE CAN AT LAST SEND OUT AN EXPLORATION TEAM... AND PROPERLY MONITOR ITS PROGRESS.
AS WE WERE UNABLE TO DO WHEN YOUR BROTHER WENT OUT, MR. PRESIDENT? HE WAS A MAJOR FORCE IN OUR SUCCESS HERE, BUT THE WORLD BEYOND HAS CORRUPTED HIM, MADE HIM TURN BARBARIAN AND RENEGADE...

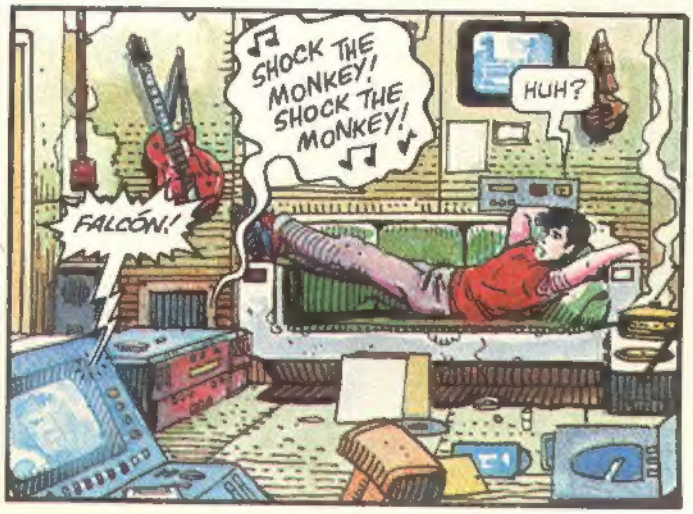
...IF THE OCCASIONAL COMMUNICATIONS FRAGMENT WE INTERCEPT CAN BE BELIEVED, PERHAPS OUR CAUSE IS BEST SERVED BY EVERYONE REMAINING HOME.

MY BROTHER'S FATE IS RUMOR. BUT IF HE HAS GONE BAD, IT'S ONE MORE DANGER WE CAN'T IGNORE.

ACTING HASTILY IS THE DANGER! WE NEED MORE SATELLITE LINK-UPS, BETTER COMMUNICATIONS... NOT EXPLORATION!

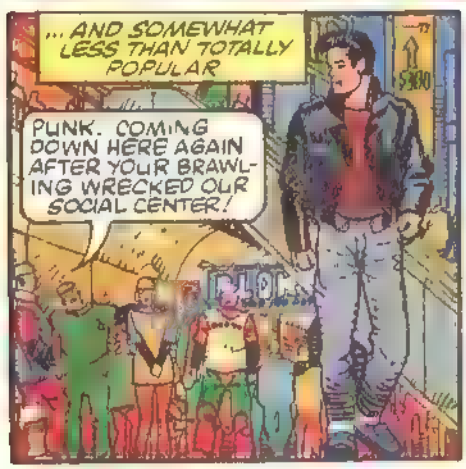
ABSURD! OUR GOAL WAS TO CREATE A BETTER SOCIETY... NOT A COLONY OF OSTRICHES! WE MUST REACH OUT.

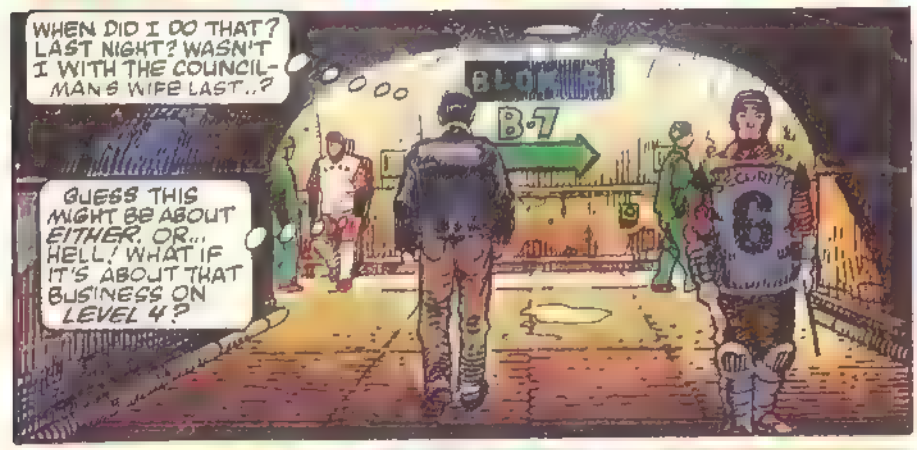
ABSURD! BUT... OUR EXPERTISE IS IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY. THIS REQUIRES SOMETHING MORE BASIC.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'BASIC'...?

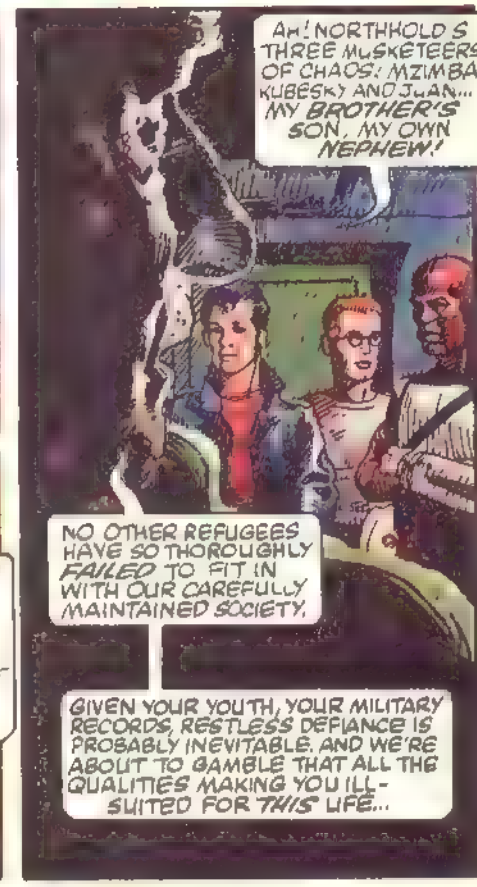

SHOCK THE MONKEY! SHOCK THE MONKEY!
HUH?
FALCÓN!

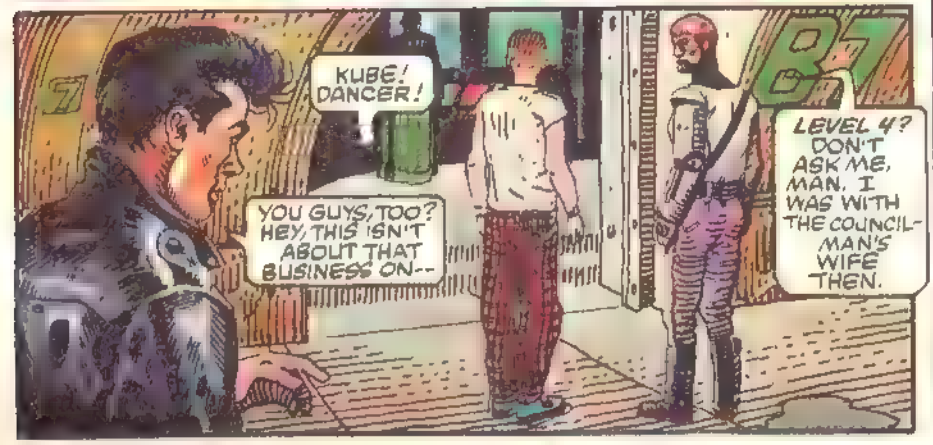
IF YOU'D QUIT PLAYING THOSE OLD TAPES LOUDER THAN PRESCRIBED LEVELS, YOU'D HEAR THE INTER-COM! REPORT TO BLOCK 7! IMMEDIATELY. IT'S THE PRESIDENT. NO FORGETTING... NO SIDE TRIPS.
OKAY, OKAY! BUT THIS BETTER NOT BE ANOTHER DUMB TRICK TO GET ME ON LITTER PATROL AGAIN!

HIS NAME IS JUAN FALCÓN. HE IS A VETERAN AND DESERTER OF AT LEAST THREE ARMIES AND A RECENT ARRIVAL AT THIS SANCTUARY KNOWN AS NORTHHOLD.
HE IS SOMEWHAT LAZY, SOMEWHAT BORED
REFUGEES

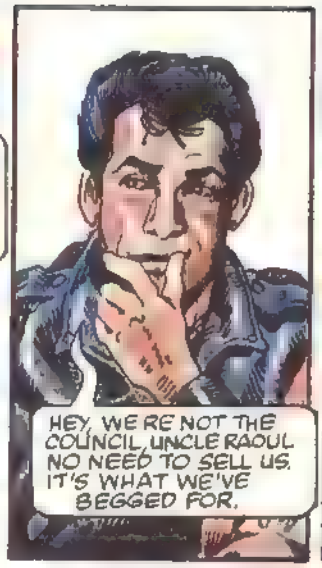

... AND SOMEWHAT LESS THAN TOTALLY POPULAR
PUNK. COMING DOWN HERE AGAIN AFTER YOUR BRAWL-ING WRECKED OUR SOCIAL CENTER!

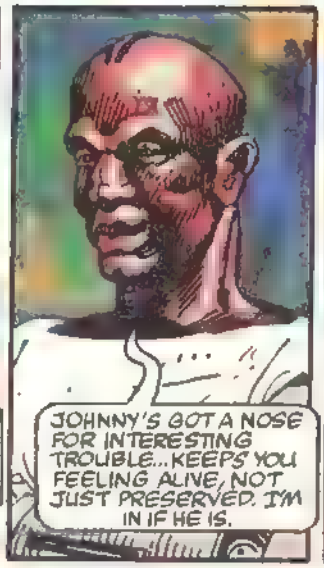

WHEN DID I DO THAT? LAST NIGHT? WASN'T I WITH THE COUNCIL-MAN'S WIFE LAST..?
GUESS THIS MIGHT BE ABOUT EITHER, OR... HELL! WHAT IF IT'S ABOUT THAT BUSINESS ON LEVEL 4?
B-7


AH! NORTHHOLD'S THREE MUSKETEERS OF CHAOS: MZIMBA, KUBESKY AND JUAN... MY BROTHER'S SON, MY OWN NEPHEW!
NO OTHER REFUGEES HAVE SO THOROUGHLY FAILED TO FIT IN WITH OUR CAREFULLY MAINTAINED SOCIETY.
GIVEN YOUR YOUTH, YOUR MILITARY RECORDS, RESTLESS DEFIANCE IS PROBABLY INEVITABLE. AND WE'RE ABOUT TO GAMBLE THAT ALL THE QUALITIES MAKING YOU ILL-SUITED FOR THIS LIFE...

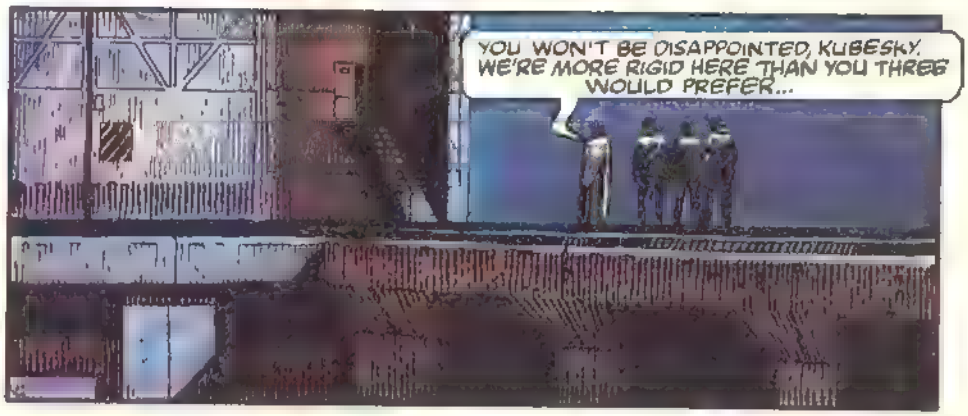

KUBE! DANCER!
YOU GUYS, TOO? HEY, THIS ISN'T ABOUT THAT BUSINESS ON--
LEVEL 4? DON'T ASK ME, MAN. I WAS WITH THE COUNCIL-MAN'S WIFE THEN.
B7

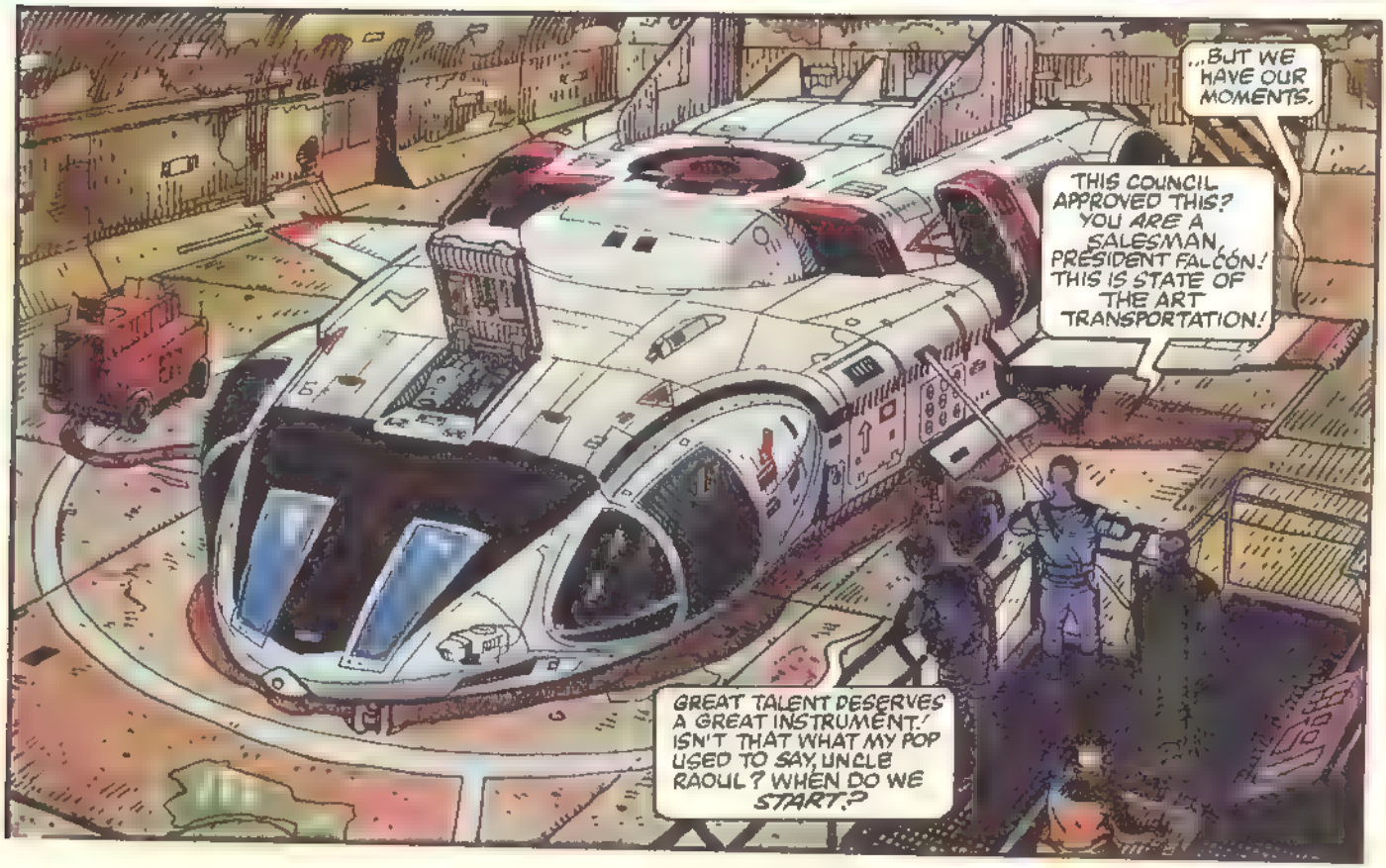
..ALSO MAKE YOU A PERFECT TEAM FOR SEEKING OTHER LIFE BEYOND HERE
WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS--SUCH AS YOUR FATHER, JUAN--WE'RE NOT ADVENTURERS AT NORTHHOLD, NOT ANY LONGER, AND YET...
EXPLORING WHATEVER WAITS OUTSIDE WILL BE THE GREATEST ADVENTURE OF ALL!

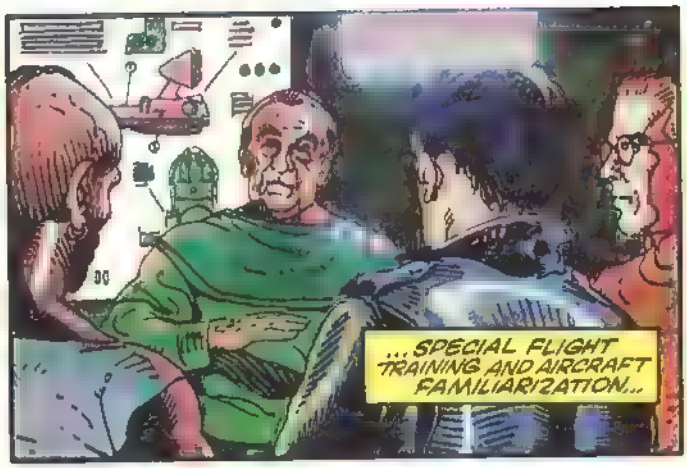

HEY, WE'RE NOT THE COUNCIL, UNCLE RAOUL NO NEED TO SELL US. IT'S WHAT WE'VE BEGGED FOR.

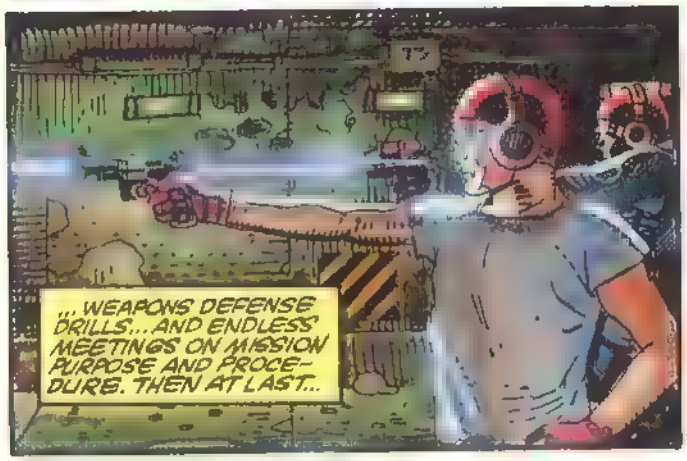

JOHNNY'S GOT A NOSE FOR INTERESTING TROUBLE...KEEPS YOU FEELING ALIVE, NOT JUST PRESERVED. I'M IN IF HE IS.

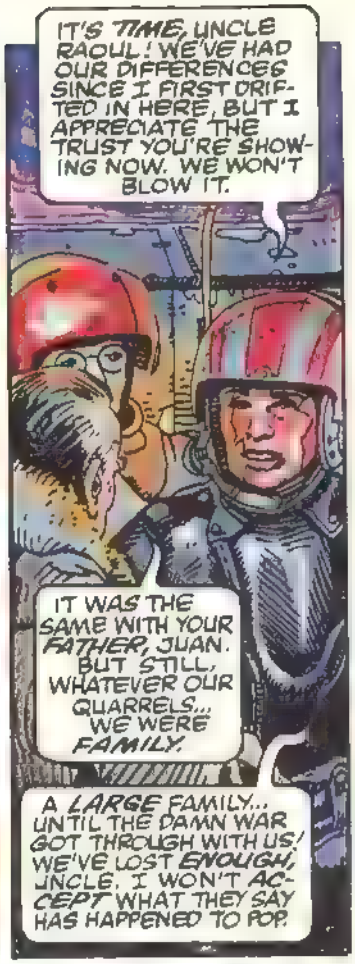
UH BEFORE COMMITTING, MY FRIENDS, WOULD IT NOT BE WISE TO SEE JUST HOW ALL THIS EXPLORING WILL BE DONE?


YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED, KUBESKY. WE'RE MORE RIGID HERE THAN YOU THREE WOULD PREFER...


...BUT WE HAVE OUR MOMENTS.
THIS COUNCIL APPROVED THIS? YOU ARE A SALESMAN, PRESIDENT FALCÓN! THIS IS STATE OF THE ART TRANSPORTATION!
GREAT TALENT DESERVES A GREAT INSTRUMENT! ISN'T THAT WHAT MY POP USED TO SAY, UNCLE RAOUL? WHEN DO WE START?







THEN FIND HIM, MY BOY...RETURN TO US WITH THE TRUTH MY BROTHER INSPIRED MANY PEOPLE HERE. IN THE END, WE'LL ALL BENEFIT. BUT DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF YOUR MAIN TASK...

THESE ARE THE OPENING MOVES OF AN ENTIRELY NEW GAME. MY GENERATION LOST THE OLD GAME.. AND AN ENTIRE WORLD. A NEW GENERATION'S BEING BORN GENERATION ONE OF A NEW WORLD. I'VE DEDICATED MYSELF TO ASSURING THAT OUR TRAGIC MISTAKES AREN'T REPEATED FOR THEM.

GENERATION ONE, HUH? YEAH THEY DESERVE SOMETHING BETTER. OTHERWISE THEY'LL WIND UP LIKE KUBE, DANCER, AN ME.. NOT PART OF ANYONE'S WORLD. GENERATION ZERO.

JUAN FALCÓN SMILES AND MOVES TO THE SHIP IN MOMENTS IT IS RISING, IN FULL FLIGHT... TOWARD THE UNKNOWN.

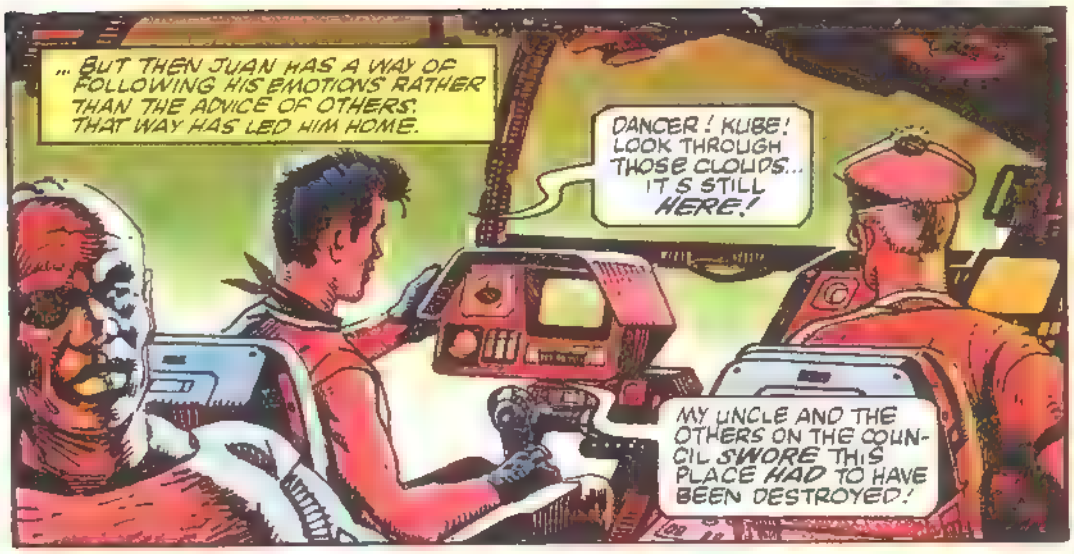
WHY GRIN SO, JOHNNY? ANYTHING WE DISCOVER MAY BE MUCH WORSE THAN NORTHHOLD.

SURE. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD, KUBE? THEY NEVER DID FIND OUT ABOUT THAT BUSINESS ON LEVEL 4.

GENERATION ZERO

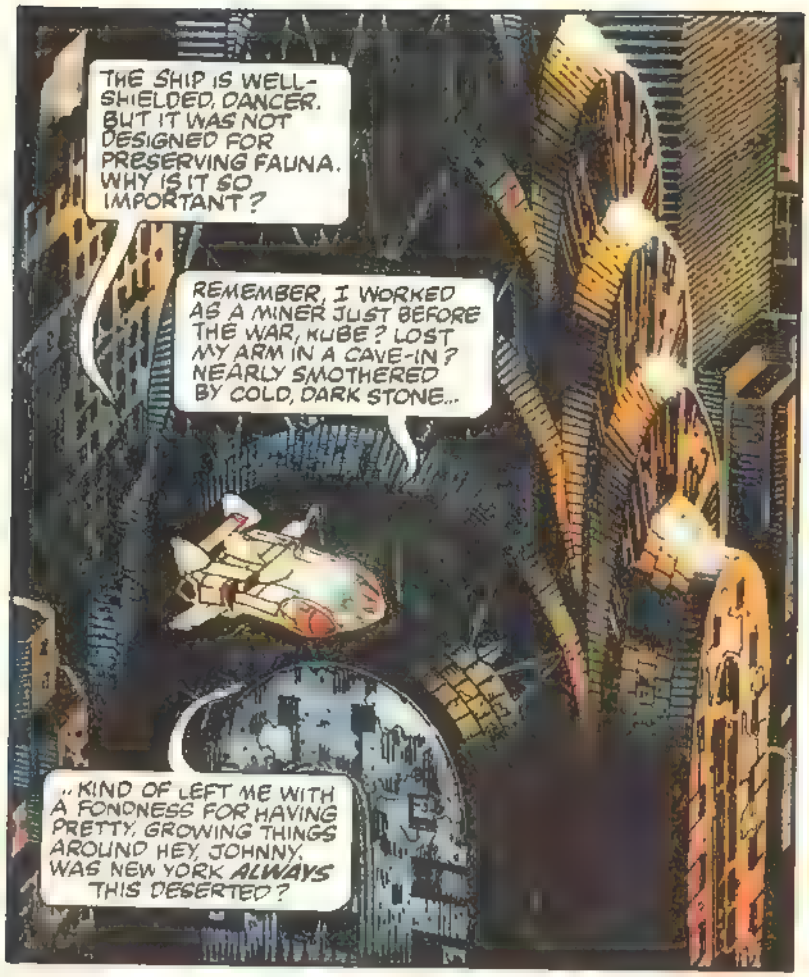
PHANTOM CITY

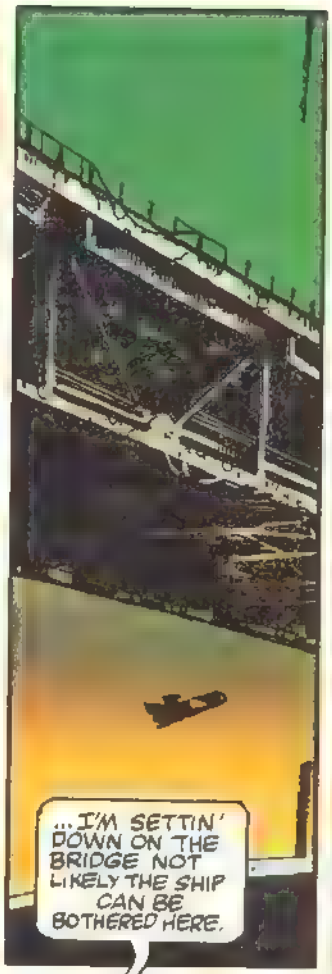
"HOW DO YOU FIND AMERICA?" "TURN LEFT AT GREENLAND." JUAN FALCON WASN'T BORN WHEN THE WORDS WERE FIRST SPOKEN, BUT HE KNOWS THEM THROUGH HIS COLLECTION OF PRE-NUCLEAR WAR TAPES. THEY COME TO HIM NOW EVEN THOUGH THE COURSE HE'S HAD NAVIGATOR PETER KUBESKY PLOT IS SOMEWHAT MORE PRECISE, AND SOMEWHAT *DIFFERENT* THAN THE COURSE RECOMMENDED BY THE SURVIVORS COUNCIL WHEN THEY PICKED HIM TO HEAD THIS EXPLORATORY MISSION FROM NORTHHOLD, THEIR UNDERGROUND SANCTUARY IN ICELAND...



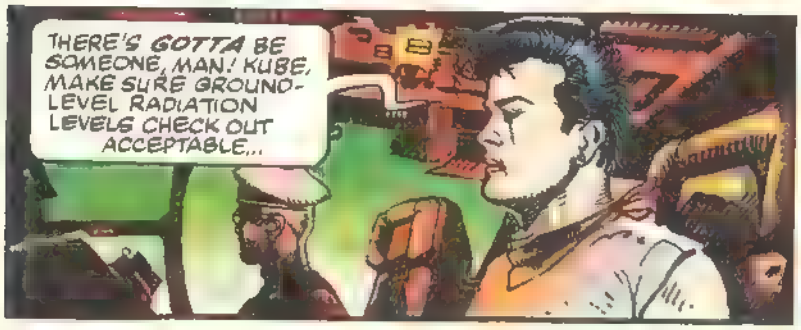
ATOMIC WEAPONS DID NOT STRIKE HERE, JOHNNY, MY FRIEND... BUT THERE ARE *OTHER* FORMS OF DESTRUCTION. THE RADIOACTIVE CLOUD LAYER WE JUST PASSED THROUGH ALONE COULD CAUSE--

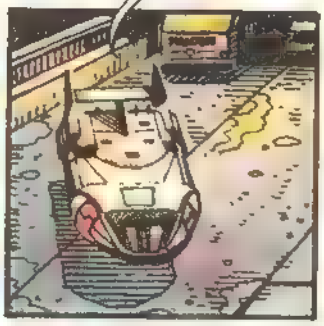
BETTER NOT CAUSE DAMAGE TO MY *FLOWERS* BACK IN THE STORAGE COMPARTMENT, KUBE. I WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE STEALING THEM FROM NORTHHOLD'S GREENHOUSE. I WANT THEM TO *LAST.*

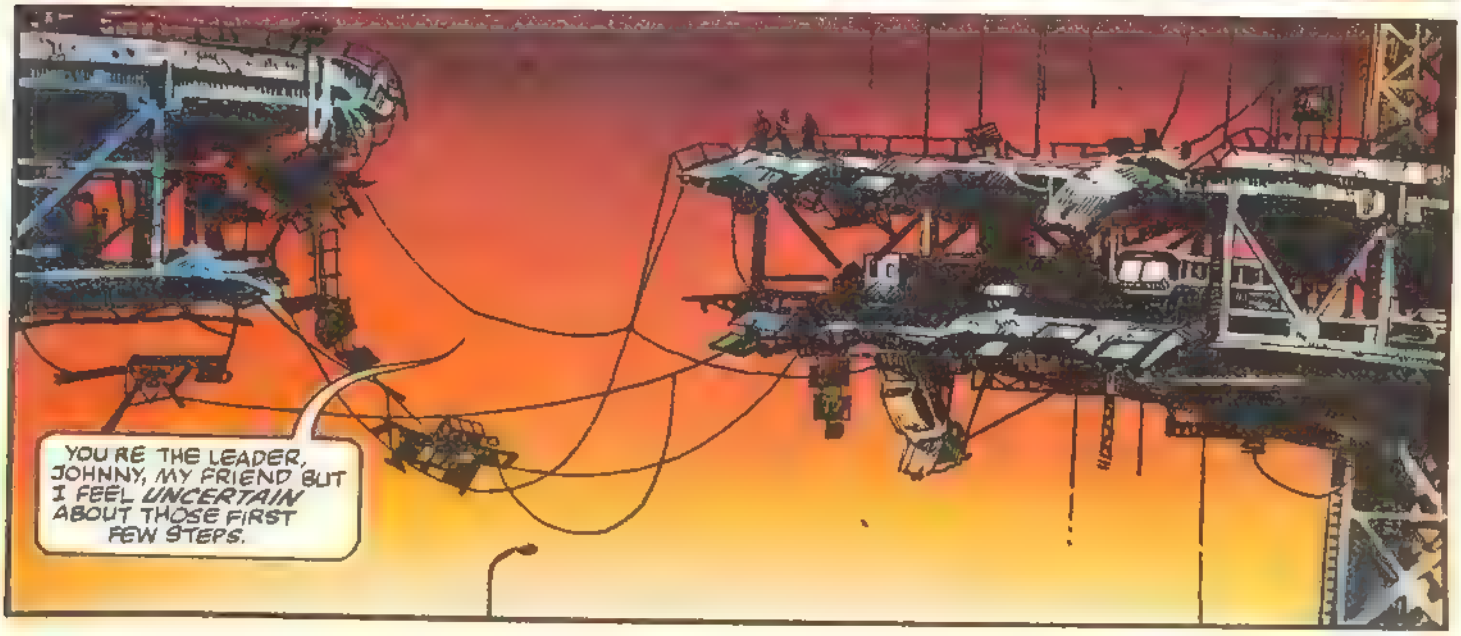

THE SHIP IS WELL-SHIELDED, DANCER. BUT IT WAS NOT DESIGNED FOR PRESERVING FAUNA. WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?
REMEMBER, I WORKED AS A MINER JUST BEFORE THE WAR, KUBE? LOST MY ARM IN A CAVE-IN? NEARLY SMOTHERED BY COLD, DARK STONE...
..KIND OF LEFT ME WITH A FONDNESS FOR HAVING PRETTY, GROWING THINGS AROUND HEY, JOHNNY, WAS NEW YORK ALWAYS THIS DESERTED?


...I'M SETTIN' DOWN ON THE BRIDGE NOT LIKELY THE SHIP CAN BE BOTHERED HERE.

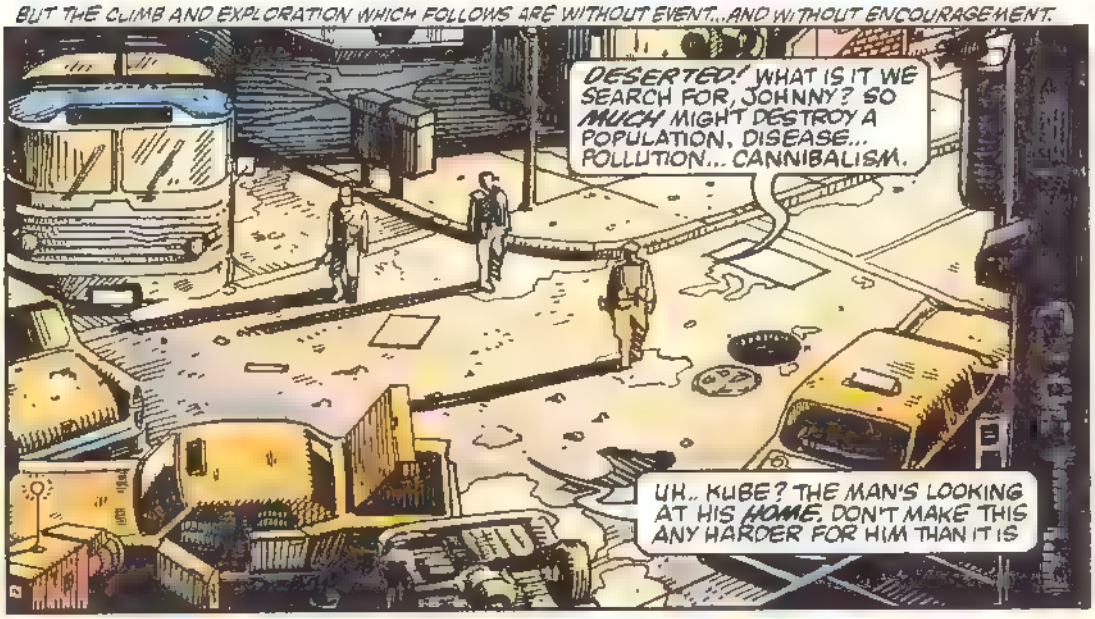
. AND WE CAN EXPLORE ON FOOT. NOW THAT I KNOW THE CITY'S STILL STANDIN', THERE'S SOMETHING I CAN'T LEAVE WITHOUT INVESTIGATIN' LET'S GO!

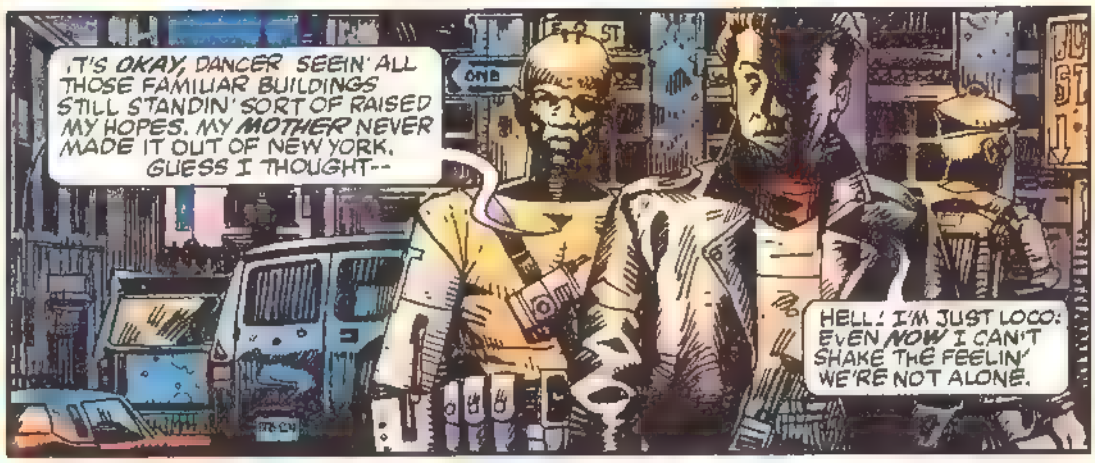

THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMEONE, MAN! KUBE, MAKE SURE GROUND-LEVEL RADIATION LEVELS CHECK OUT ACCEPTABLE...

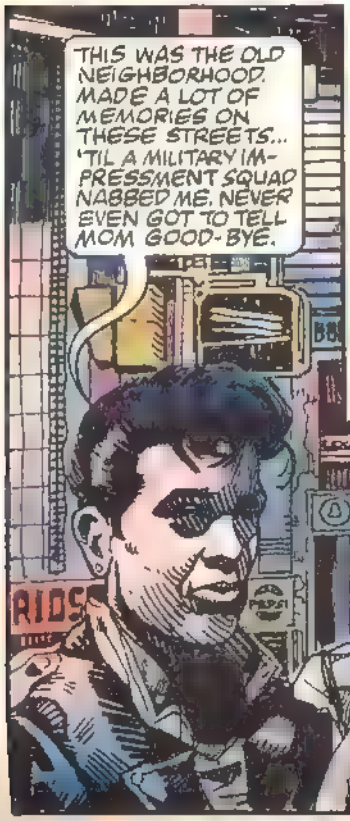


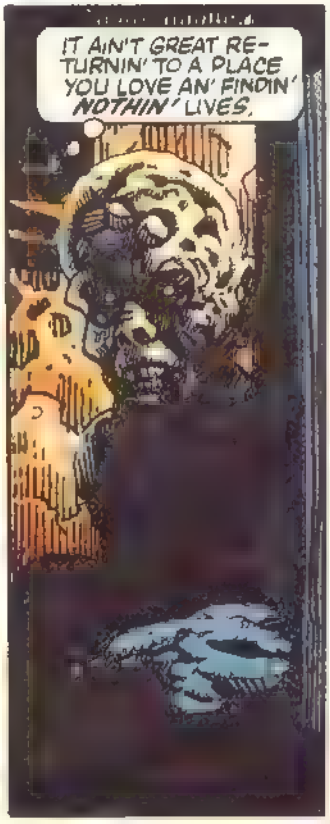

YOU'RE THE LEADER, JOHNNY, MY FRIEND BUT I FEEL UNCERTAIN ABOUT THOSE FIRST FEW STEPS.

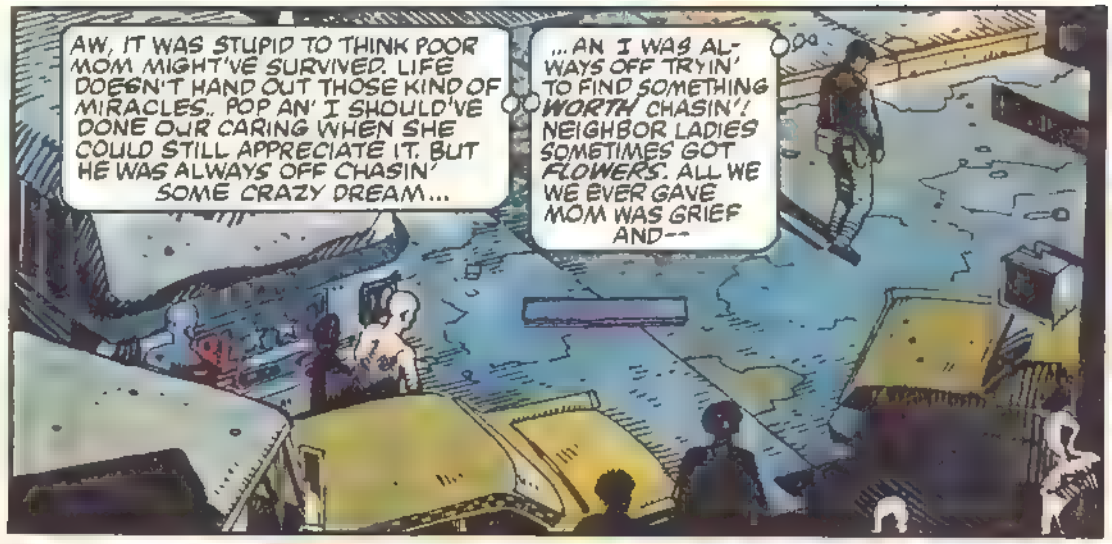
BUT THE CLIMB AND EXPLORATION WHICH FOLLOWS ARE WITHOUT EVENT...AND WITHOUT ENCOURAGEMENT.





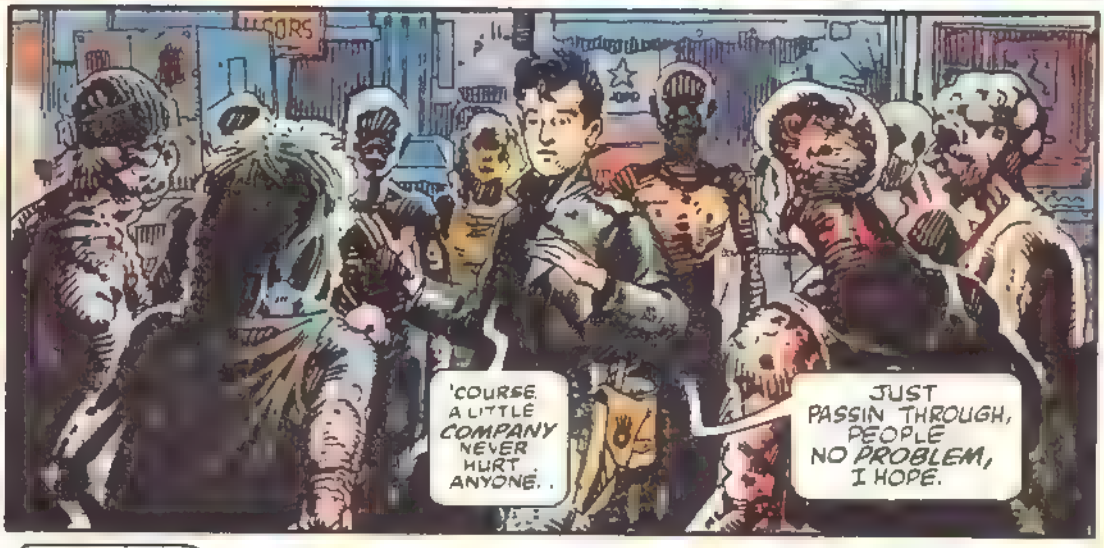




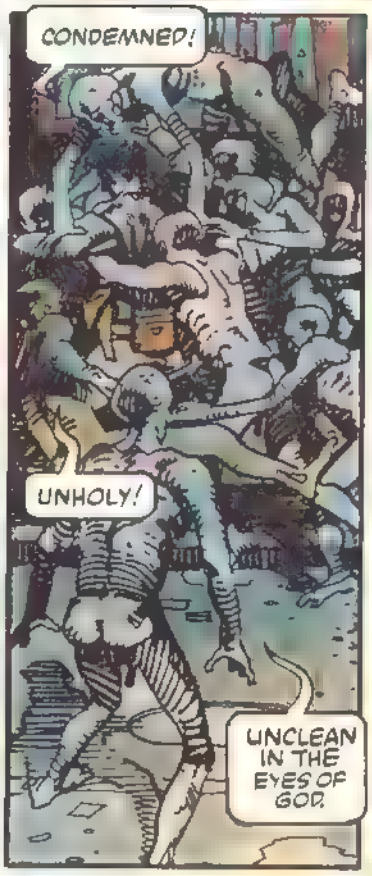

AW, IT WAS STUPID TO THINK POOR MOM MIGHT'VE SURVIVED. LIFE DOESN'T HAND OUT THOSE KIND OF MIRACLES.. POP AN' I SHOULD'VE DONE OUR CARING WHEN SHE COULD STILL APPRECIATE IT. BUT HE WAS ALWAYS OFF CHASIN' SOME CRAZY DREAM...
...AN I WAS ALWAYS OFF TRYIN' TO FIND SOMETHING WORTH CHASIN'! NEIGHBOR LADIES SOMETIMES GOT FLOWERS. ALL WE WE EVER GAVE MOM WAS GRIEF AND--

TCHOK!

DANCER...? KUBE..? YOU GUYS FORGET I FELT LIKE BEIN' ALONE TO--

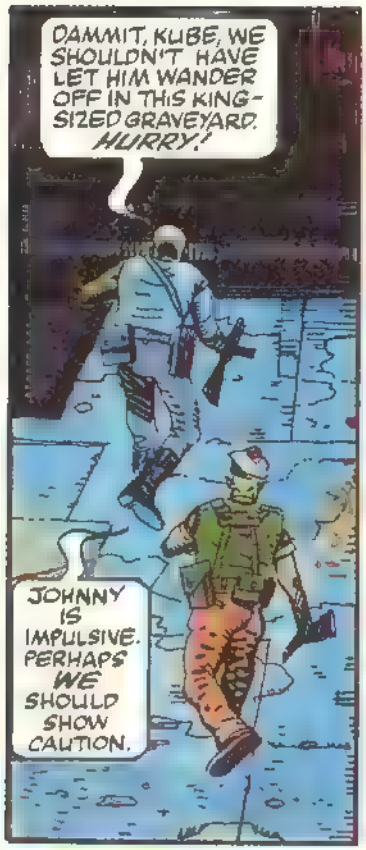

LIQUORS
'COURSE. A LITTLE COMPANY NEVER HURT ANYONE..
JUST PASSIN THROUGH, PEOPLE NO PROBLEM, I HOPE.

UNCLEAN...! UNHOLY...! CONDEMNED BY... THE EYES OF GOD...!


CONDEMNED!
UNHOLY!
UNCLEAN IN THE EYES OF GOD.

AAAAAAAAAAAA

W 42
DANCER! THAT SOUNDS LIKE--
IT'S JUAN!

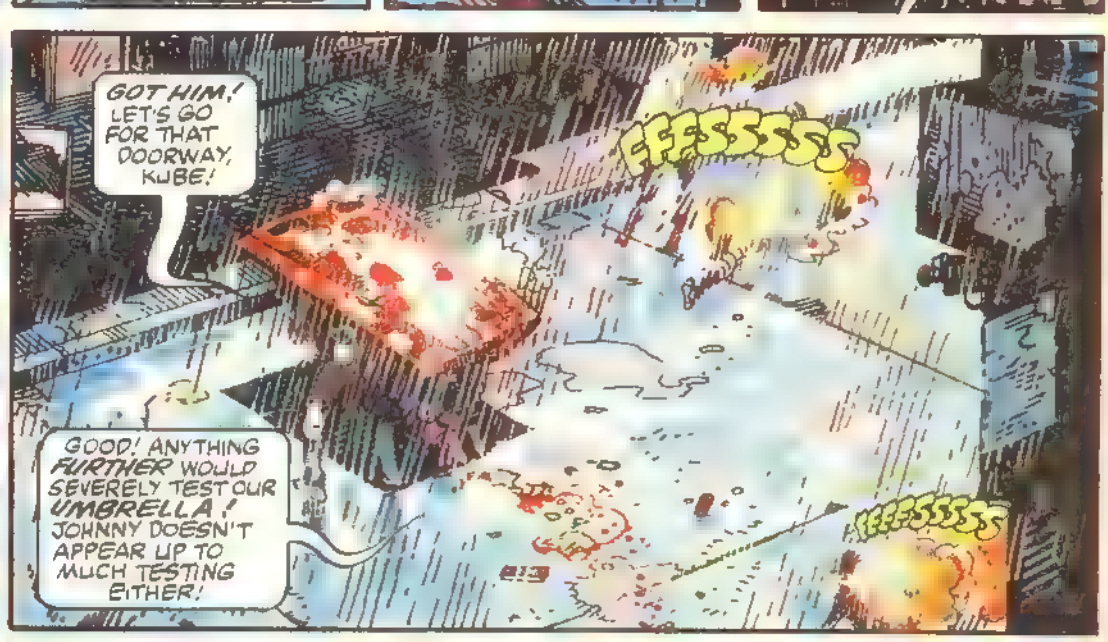

DAMMIT, KUBE, WE SHOULDN'T HAVE LET HIM WANDER OFF IN THIS KING-SIZED GRAVEYARD. HURRY!
JOHNNY IS IMPULSIVE. PERHAPS WE SHOULD SHOW CAUTION.

NO TIME FOR IT! LOOK! THOSE... T-THINGS ARE TEARING HIM APART!
DANCER .. WAIT! DON T RUSH THEM LISTEN! THAT'S--

FSSSS
FSSSS

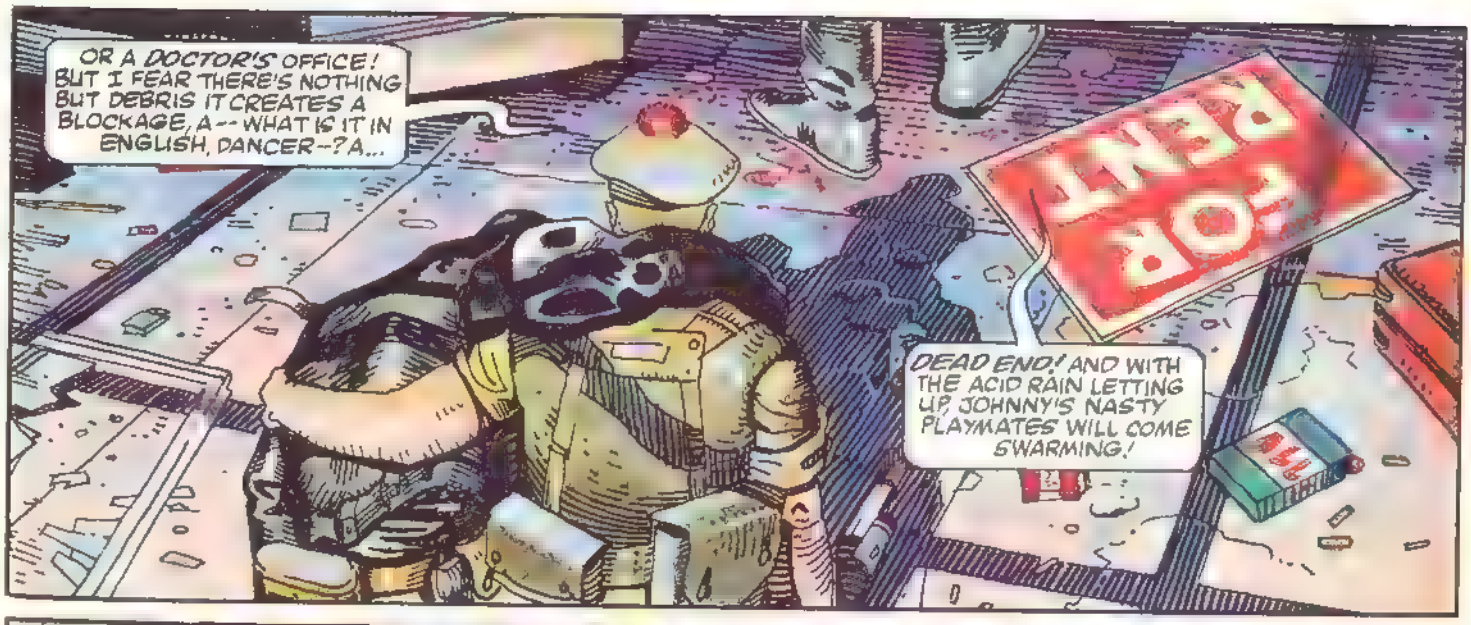
THUNDER IS WHAT PETER KUBESKY HEARD. AND WHAT ACCOMPANIES IT IS EXACTLY WHAT HE FEARED!
ACID RAIN! SWIFTLY DANCER! SOMETHING FROM THAT WRECKED CAR!

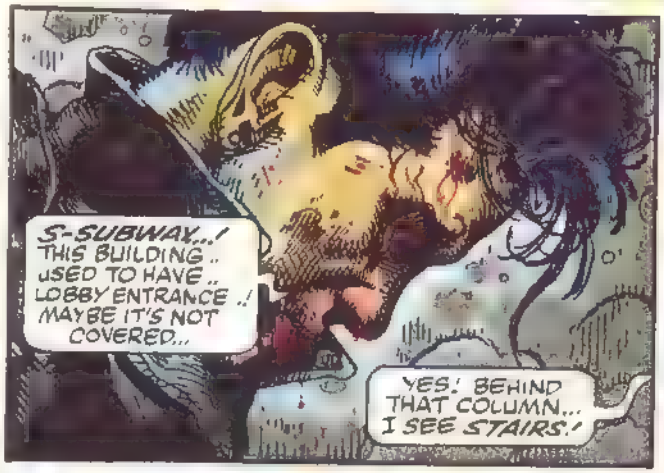
AAAARGGG
FFSSSS
STUFF'S BURNING EVERYBODY UP! WILL THIS TRUNK LID DO IT?!
THAT WE WILL LEARN IN THE NEXT FEW MOMENTS.

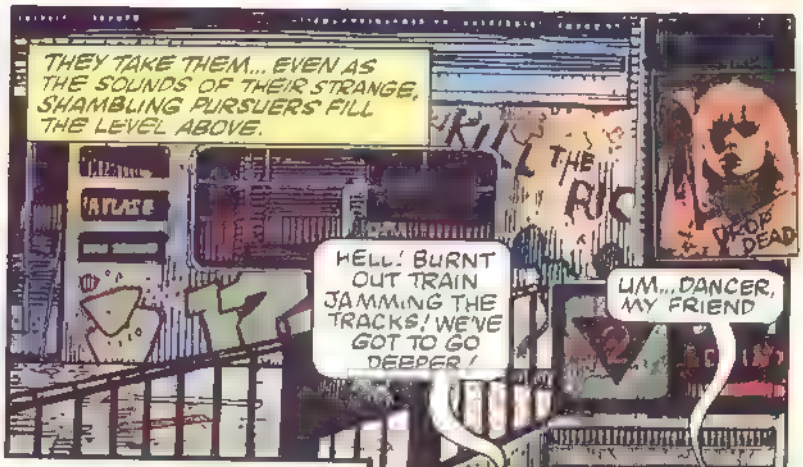

GOT HIM! LET'S GO FOR THAT DOORWAY, KUBE!
FFFSSSSS
GOOD! ANYTHING FURTHER WOULD SEVERELY TEST OUR UMBRELLA! JOHNNY DOESN'T APPEAR UP TO MUCH TESTING EITHER!
FFFSSSSS

BEEEP!

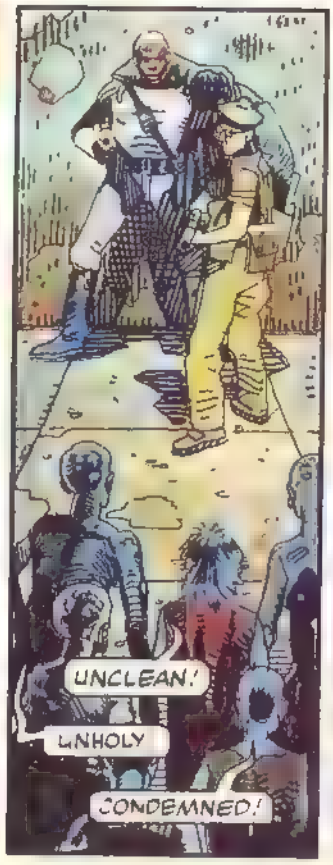
DAMN THINGS ARE TRYING TO REGROUP ACROSS THE STREET.
I HOPE THIS PLACE HAS A BACK DOOR!


OR A DOCTOR'S OFFICE! BUT I FEAR THERE'S NOTHING BUT DEBRIS IT CREATES A BLOCKAGE, A-- WHAT IS IT IN ENGLISH, DANCER--? A...
FOR RENT
DEAD END! AND WITH THE ACID RAIN LETTING UP, JOHNNY'S NASTY PLAYMATES WILL COME SWARMING!


S-SUBWAY..! THIS BUILDING.. USED TO HAVE.. LOBBY ENTRANCE..! MAYBE IT'S NOT COVERED...
YES! BEHIND THAT COLUMN... I SEE STAIRS!


THEY TAKE THEM... EVEN AS THE SOUNDS OF THEIR STRANGE, SHAMBLING PURSUERS FILL THE LEVEL ABOVE.
HELL! BURNT OUT TRAIN JAMMING THE TRACKS! WE'VE GOT TO GO DEEPER!
UM... DANCER, MY FRIEND
DROP DEAD

...IT IS ANOTHER DEAD END.
WELL, AT LEAST YOU GOT A CHANCE TO USE THE NEW WORD, KUBE... ONE LAST TIME!


UNCLEAN!
UNHOLY
CONDEMNED!

KREEEEEKK

I DON'T KNOW WHERE THIS LEADS... BUT SURELY IT WON'T BE ANY WORSE!
I BELIEVE YOU'LL FIND IT CONSIDERABLY BETTER... IF YOU'LL FOLLOW AND TRUST ME

THEY SETTLE FOR **FOLLOWING**. TRUST COMES LATER WHERE A TUNNEL MAZE LEADS TO...

...THE CITY'S MAIN LIBRARY. OVER THE YEARS, WE'VE TURNED IT INTO A HOSPITAL... OPERATING WITH SOME SUCCESS, DESPITE THE PRIEST.

I DON'T KNOW WHO THIS *PRIEST* IS, BUT IF YOU CAN TREAT *THESE* POOR BASTARDS... FIXING UP JOHNNY SHOULD BE LIGHT WORK.

DANCER IS WRONG. HIS *WOUNDS* ARE TREATABLE. THE *INFECTION* THEY INDUCE ARE NOT. DRUGS *SLOW* IT, BUT THE EVENTUAL PROGNOSIS IS...

...*DEATH*. THE LOCALS HAVE *MUTATED*. THEY CAN SURVIVE HERE... WE CAN'T. IF KUBE AND I GET OUT IN TIME... NO PROBLEM. BUT IN *YOUR* CASE...

WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO RETARD THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DETERIORATION IN OUR OWN PEOPLE. I HOPED I COULD DO THE SAME FOR YOU, MR. FALCON.

IF ONLY YOU HADN'T BEEN *ATTACKED*! BUT... THE PRIEST-- AND ALL THAT HE PREACHES-- TOUCHES SO MANY *MORE* THAN WE DO.

"HE USES THE OLD VIDEO COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS... TO PREACH HATE AND COMPLACENCY. TO MAINTAIN CONTROL THROUGH FEAR AND IGNORANCE."

THINK HE'LL BE *HERE*, JOHNNY?

NEARBY. THIS WAS A BIG BROADCAST CENTER.

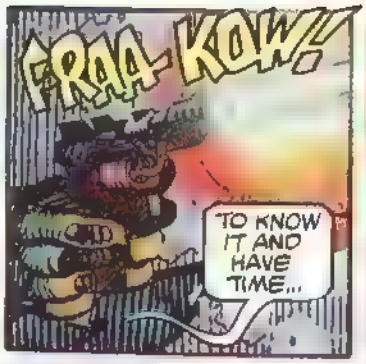
I KNOW YOU TWO FAVOR DIRECTNESS, BUT CONSIDERING OUR *FOE*, IS IT NOT--

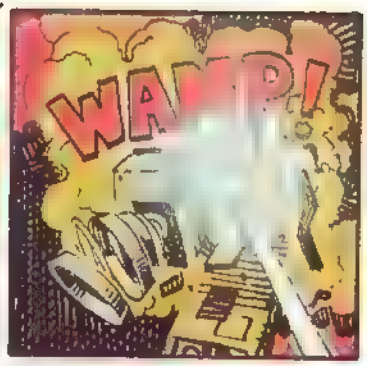
BLAW!

I *WANT* THE SON OF A BITCH WHO *KILLED* ME TO *KNOW* I'M COMING FOR HIM, KUBE!

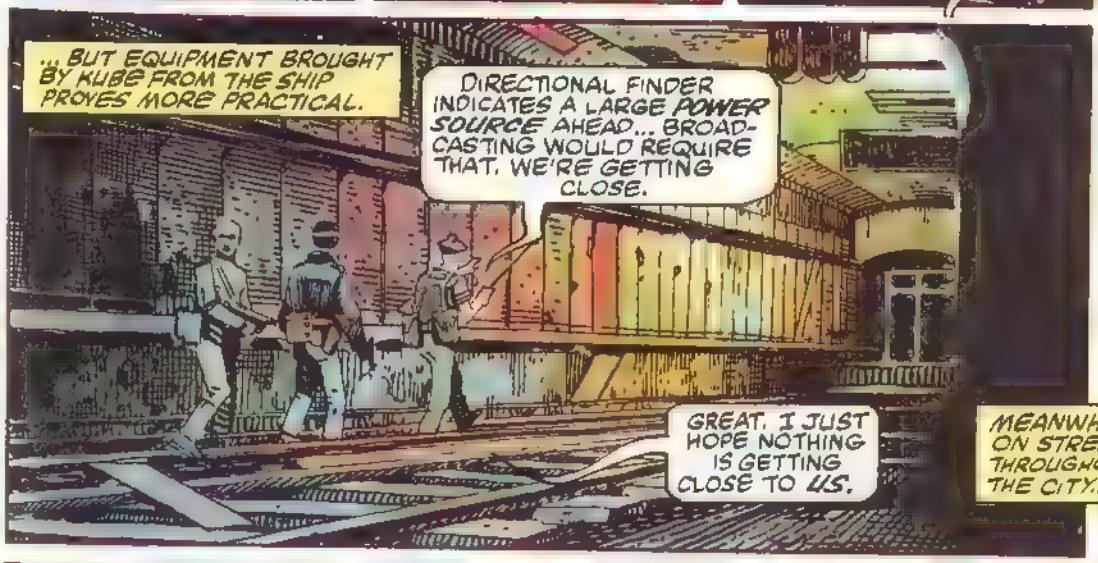
BEEEEEEP

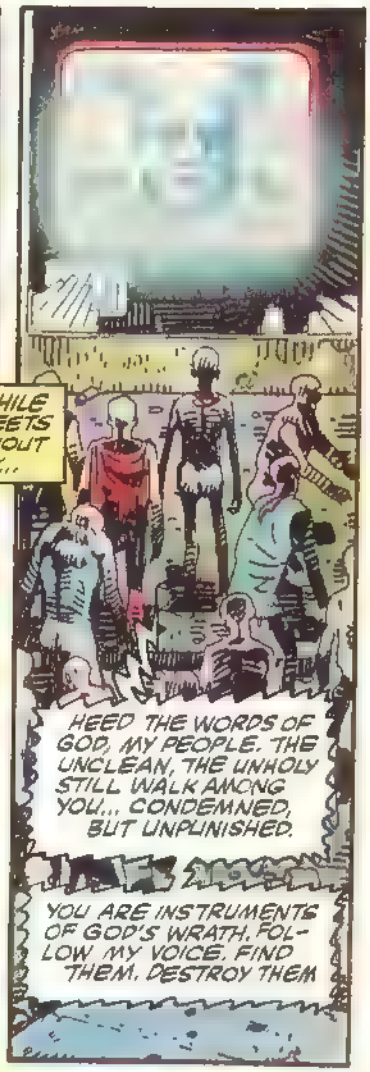
POW



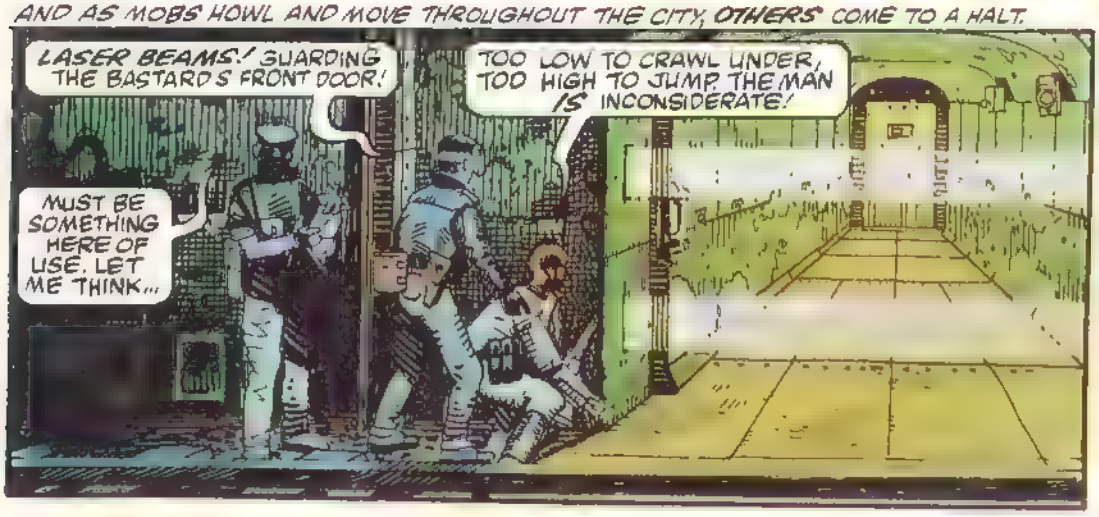


THESE ARE THE 'EYES OF GOD' AND JUAN FINDS SOME SATISFACTION IN BLINDING THEM...





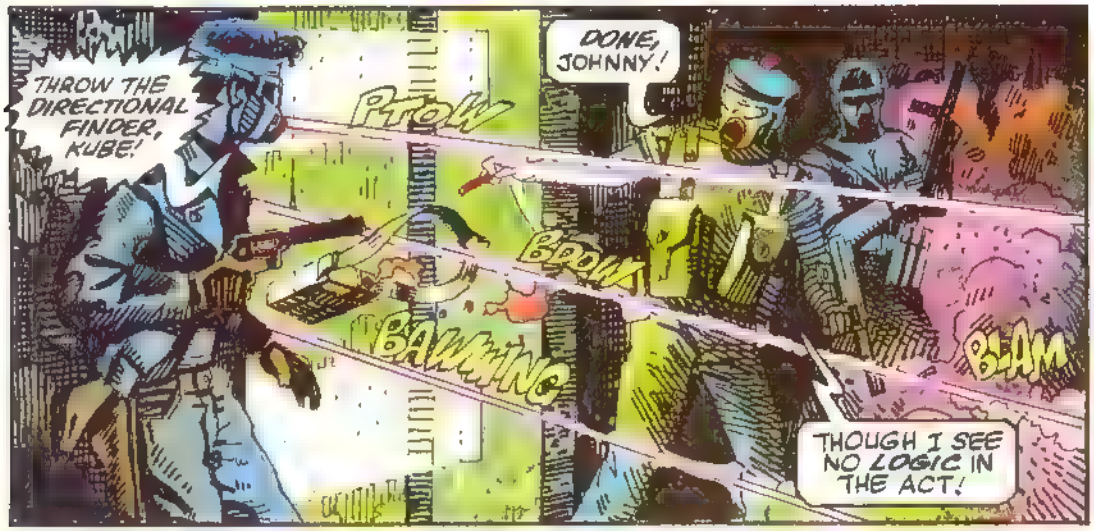
AND AS MOBS HOWL AND MOVE THROUGHOUT THE CITY, OTHERS COME TO A HALT.



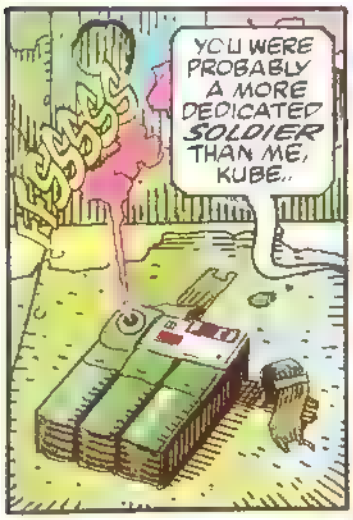
FOR THEM... I HAVE A REMEDY. PUT THESE MASKS ON.

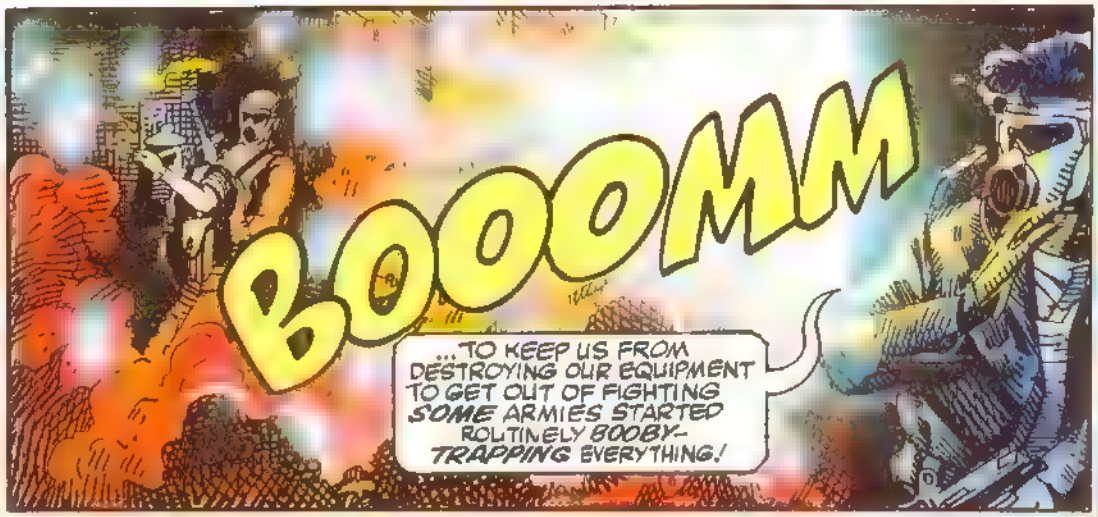
FLOOOP

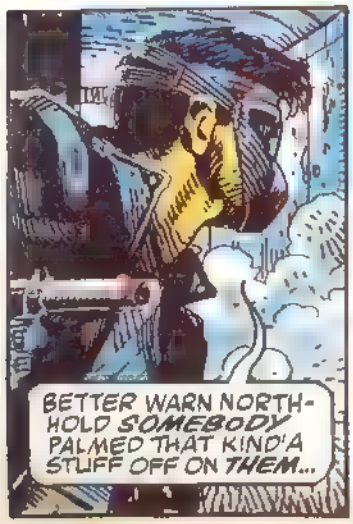
RIOT GAS!
NON-LETHAL.. STILL, IT WILL SLOW ANYONE BEHIND US BUT THE BEAMS AND WHAT THEY MAY TRIGGER--

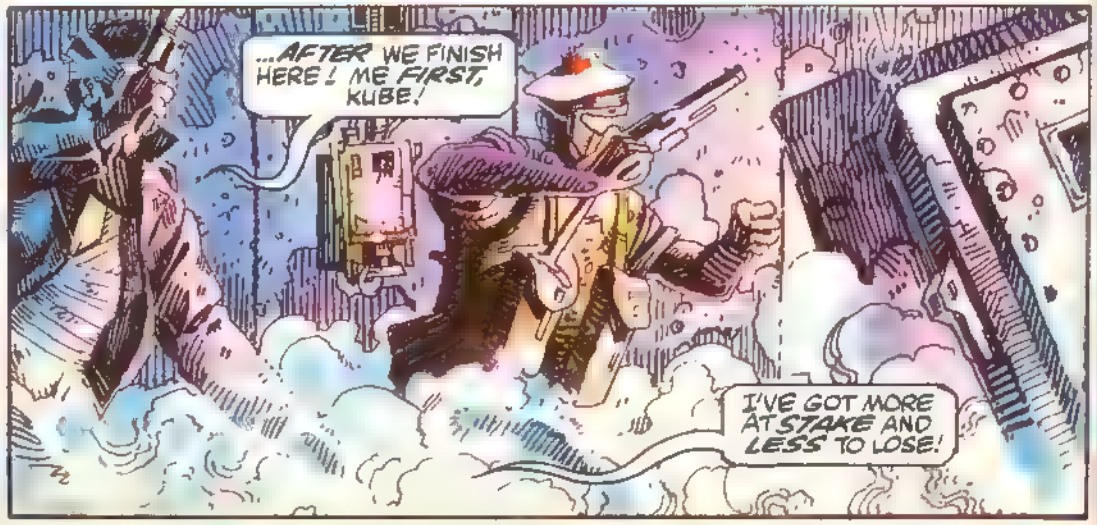

THROW THE DIRECTIONAL FINDER, KUBE!
DONE, JOHNNY!
PTOW
BPOW
BAWWING
BLAM
THOUGH I SEE NO LOGIC IN THE ACT!

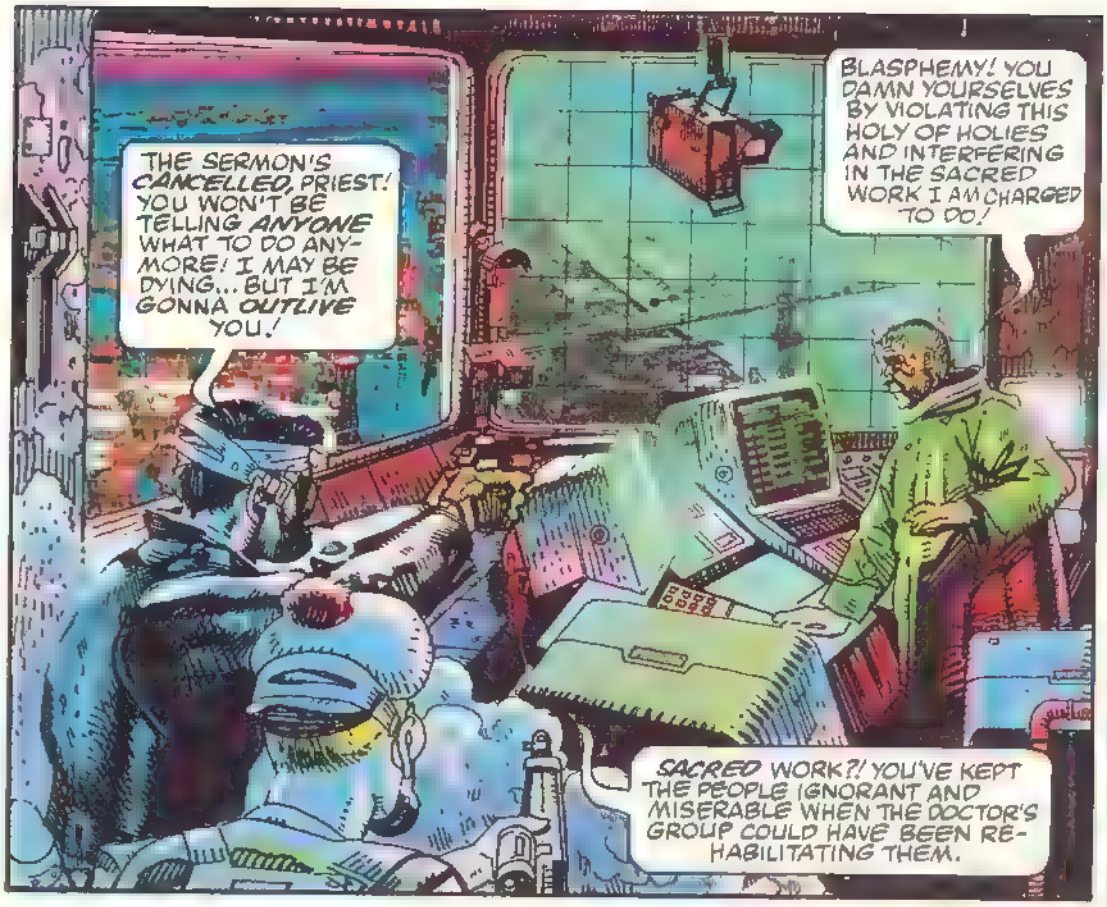
PLONK


YOU WERE PROBABLY A MORE DEDICATED SOLDIER THAN ME, KUBE..


BOOOMM
...TO KEEP US FROM DESTROYING OUR EQUIPMENT TO GET OUT OF FIGHTING SOME ARMIES STARTED ROUTINELY BOOBY-TRAPPING EVERYTHING!


BETTER WARN NORTHHOLD SOMEBODY PALMED THAT KIND'A STUFF OFF ON THEM...

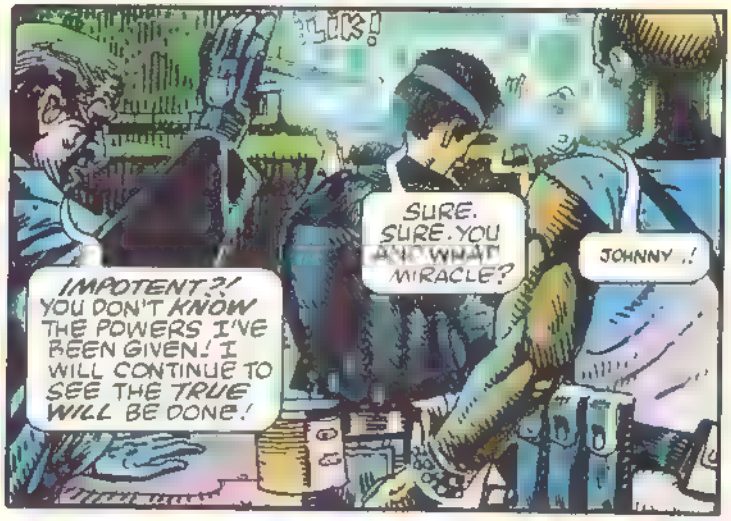

...AFTER WE FINISH HERE! ME FIRST, KUBE!
I'VE GOT MORE AT STAKE AND LESS TO LOSE!


THE SERMON'S CANCELLED, PRIEST! YOU WON'T BE TELLING ANYONE WHAT TO DO ANYMORE! I MAY BE DYING... BUT I'M GONNA OUTLIVE YOU!
BLASPHEMY! YOU DAMN YOURSELVES BY VIOLATING THIS HOLY OF HOLIES AND INTERFERING IN THE SACRED WORK I AM CHARGED TO DO!
SACRED WORK?! YOU'VE KEPT THE PEOPLE IGNORANT AND MISERABLE WHEN THE DOCTOR'S GROUP COULD HAVE BEEN REHABILITATING THEM.

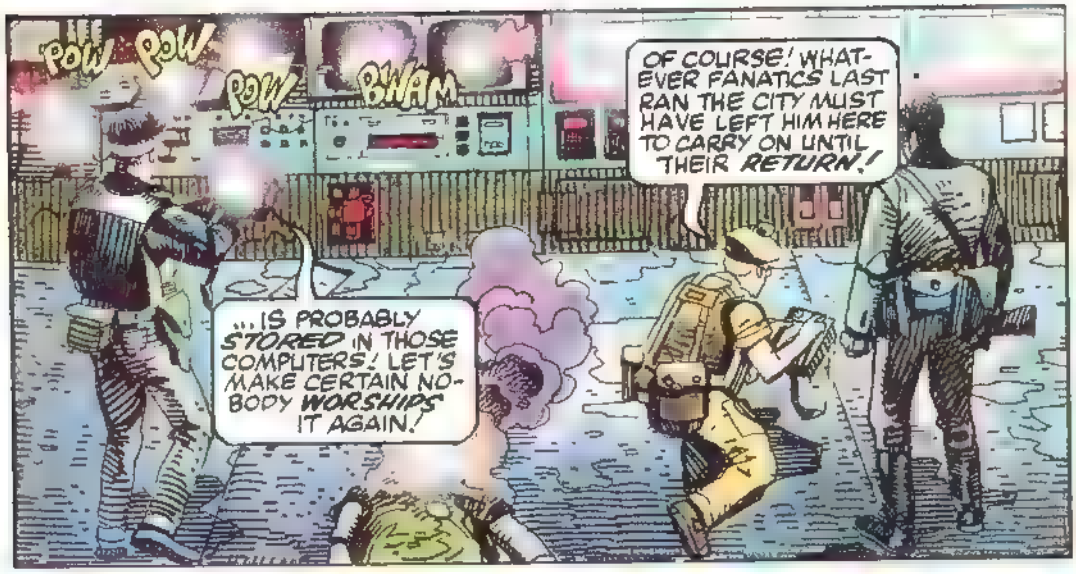
THEY HAD NOTHING TO LIVE FOR! THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD...
..I GAVE THEM PURPOSE... I PRESERVED THEM AND MAINTAINED THEIR BELIEF!

AT THE COST OF STAYING MONSTERS UNTIL THEY DIE... MY MOTHER AMONG THEM, YOU UNFEELING SHIT!
YOU'RE NOT WORTH SHOOTING! I SHOULD TEAR YOU APART LIKE... LIKE...
JUAN... NO! THE ONLY TRUE MONSTER IN THIS CITY IS HIM! DON'T LET HIM MAKE YOU ONE AS WELL.

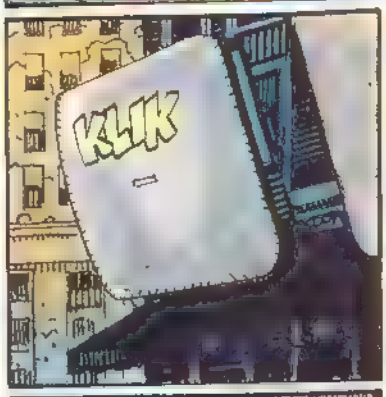
YOU... YOU'RE RIGHT, KUBE. STRIPPED OF THESE TOYS, HE'S ALREADY DESTROYED AN IMPOTENT OLD MAN.


IMPOTENT?! YOU DON'T KNOW THE POWERS I'VE BEEN GIVEN! I WILL CONTINUE TO SEE THE TRUE WILL BE DONE!
SURE. SURE. YOU [illegible] WHAT MIRACLE?
JOHNNY..!

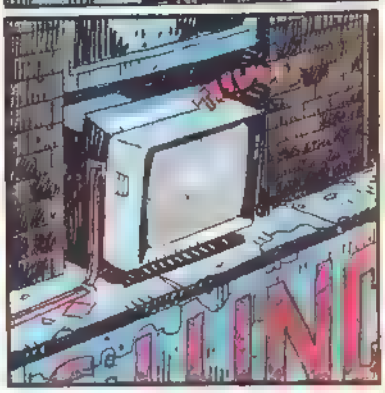
POW!
PRIEST... YOU TALK TOO MUCH! I-- HEY! W-WHAT...?
A ROBOT?! THEN THE 'GOD' HE SERVED...

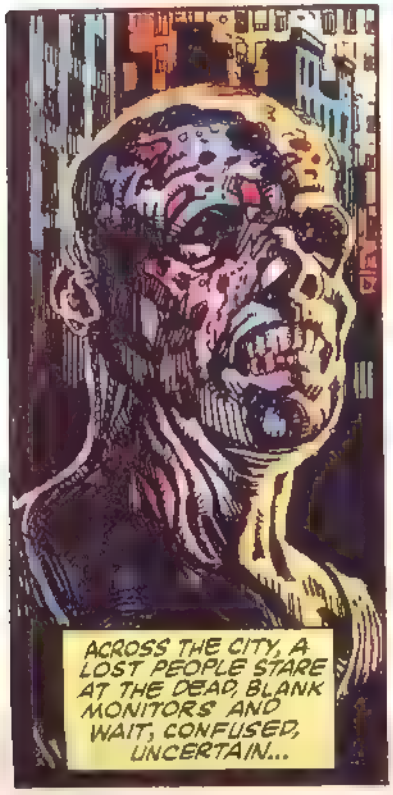

POW POW
POW
B'WAM
OF COURSE! WHATEVER FANATICS LAST RAN THE CITY MUST HAVE LEFT HIM HERE TO CARRY ON UNTIL THEIR RETURN!
...IS PROBABLY STORED IN THOSE COMPUTERS! LET'S MAKE CERTAIN NOBODY WORSHIPS IT AGAIN!

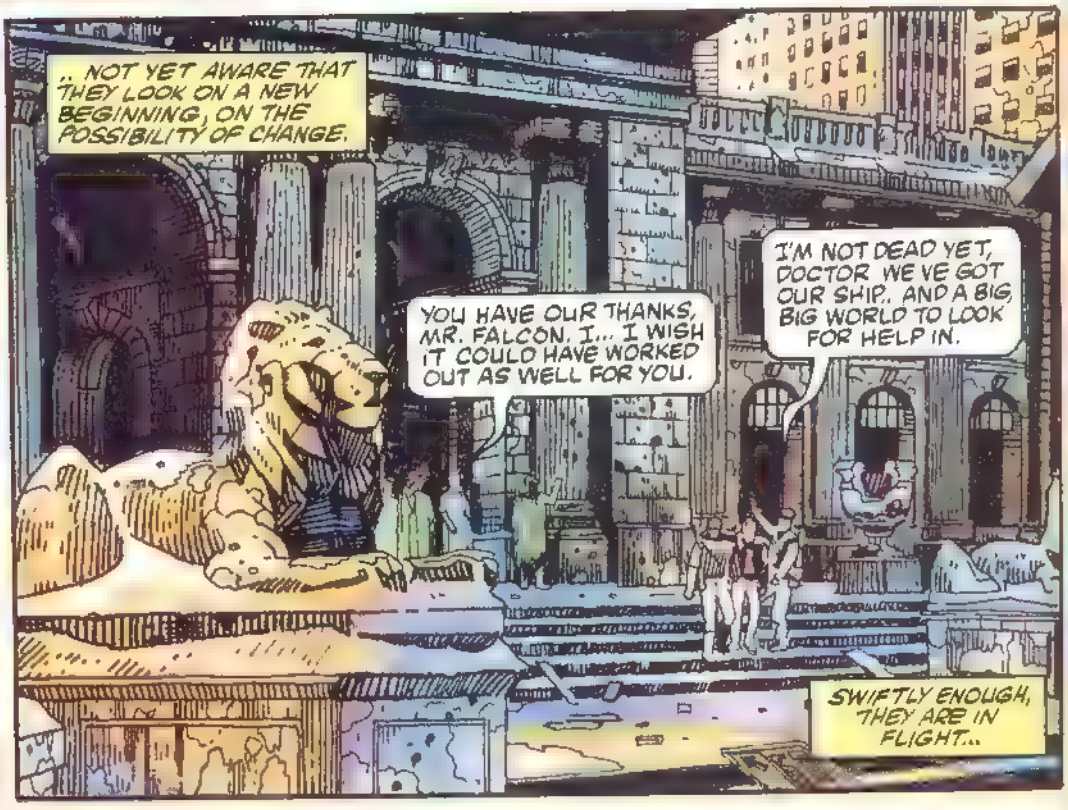
KLIK
KLIK
KLIK


KLIK

WHA-BLOM!
BUT WITH SOME CAREFUL CROSS-WIRING AND MIS-DIRECTING OF POWER-FEED CIRCUITS...
...AN ELECTRONIC EMPIRE CRUMBLES AND THE RETURN OF ANY WHO WOULD EXPLOIT IT IS DENIED.




ACROSS THE CITY, A LOST PEOPLE STARE AT THE DEAD, BLANK MONITORS AND WAIT, CONFUSED, UNCERTAIN...


.. NOT YET AWARE THAT THEY LOOK ON A NEW BEGINNING, ON THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE.
YOU HAVE OUR THANKS, MR. FALCON. I... I WISH IT COULD HAVE WORKED OUT AS WELL FOR YOU.
I'M NOT DEAD YET, DOCTOR. WE'VE GOT OUR SHIP, AND A BIG, BIG WORLD TO LOOK FOR HELP IN.
SWIFTLY ENOUGH, THEY ARE IN FLIGHT...

NEXT ISSUE: **GENERATION ZERO** CONTINUES!

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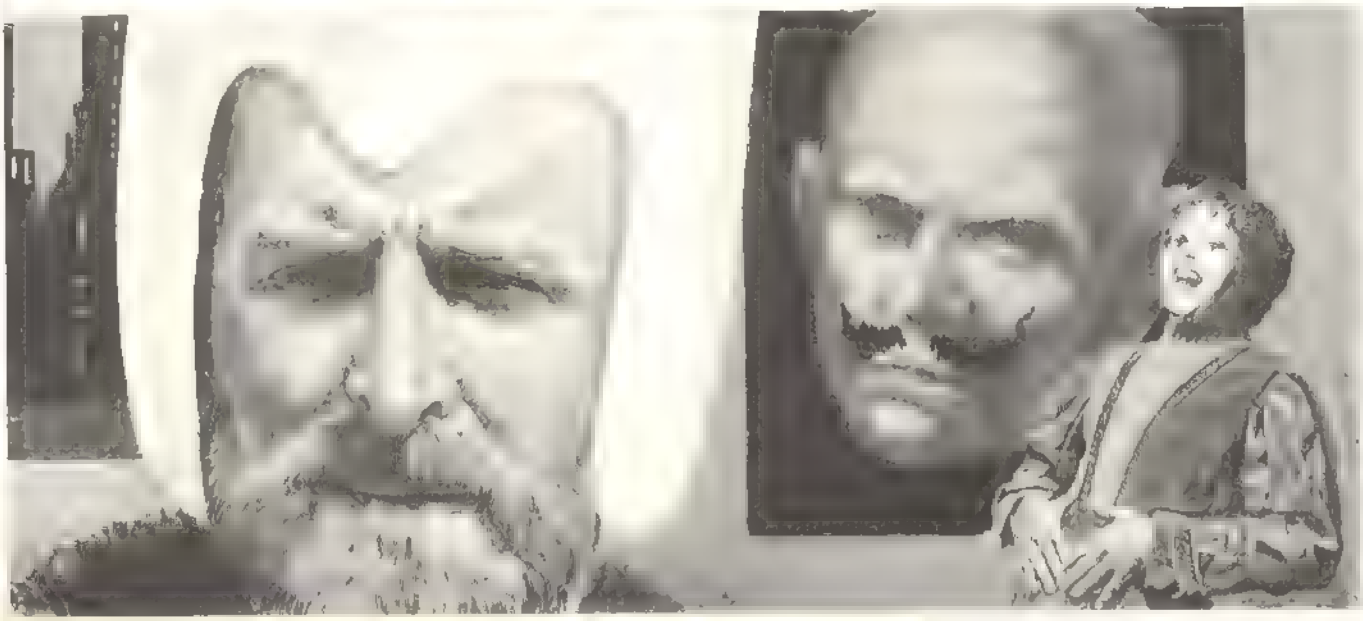
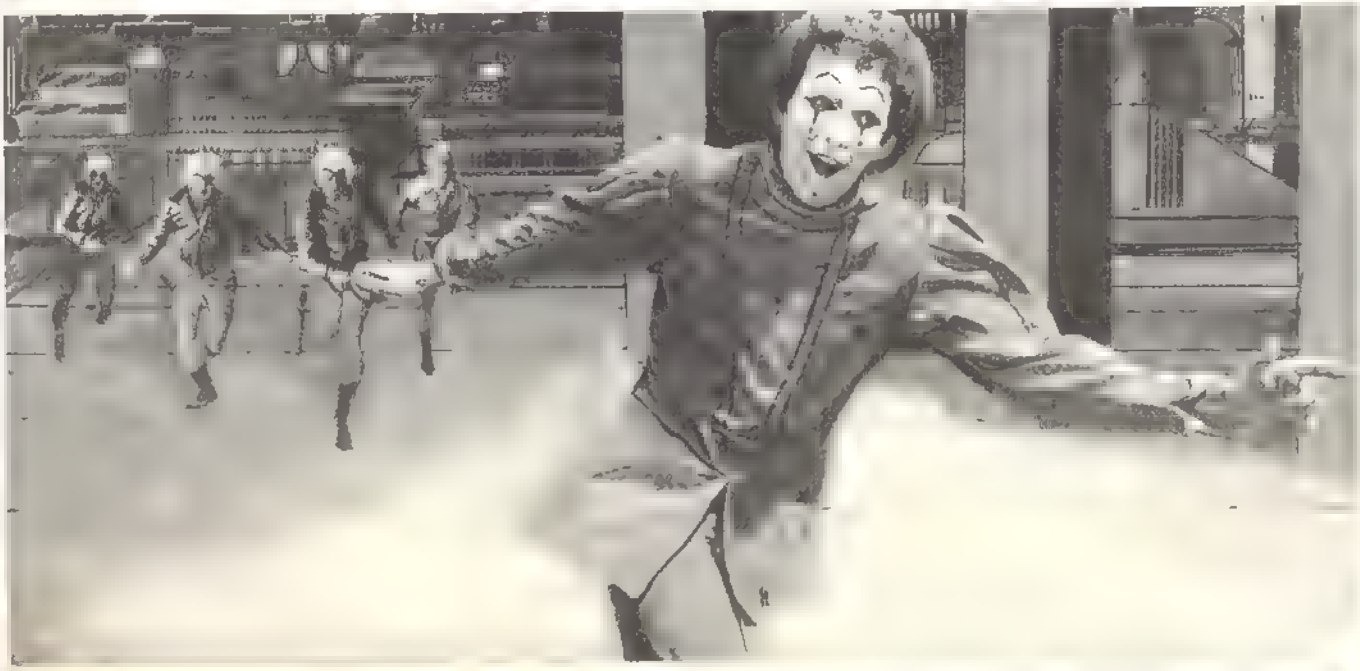
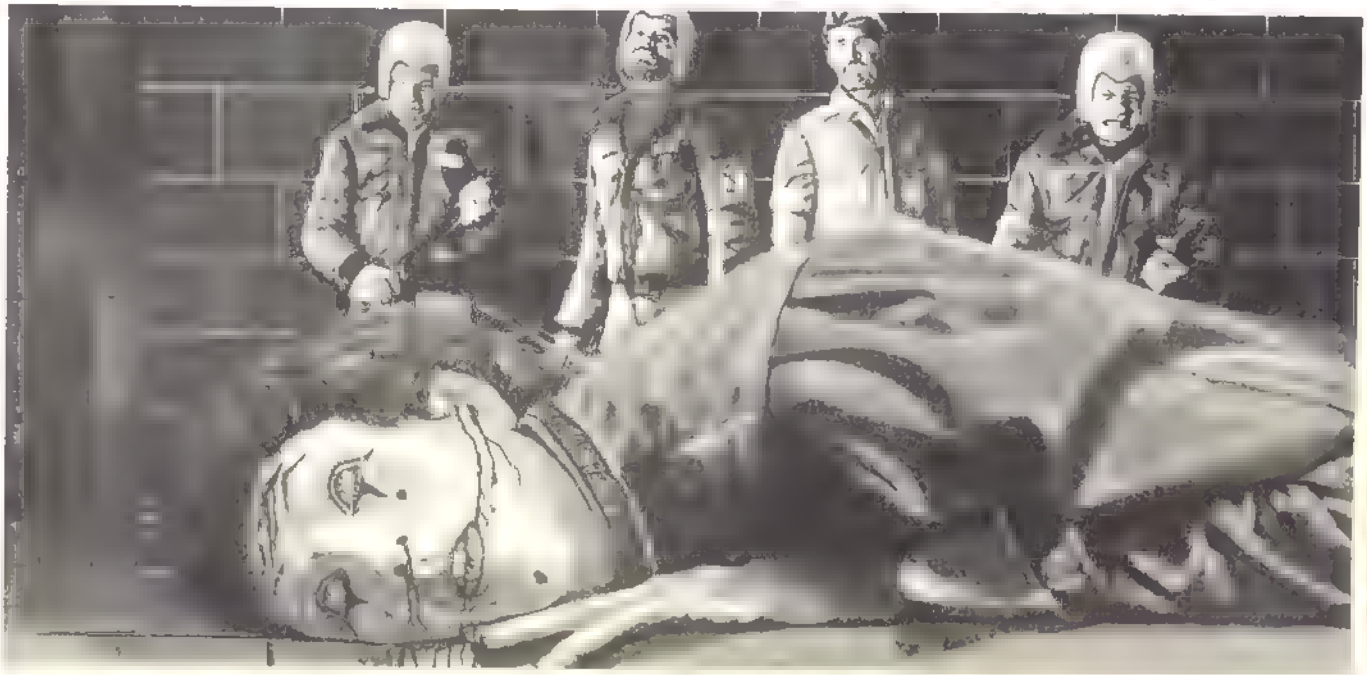
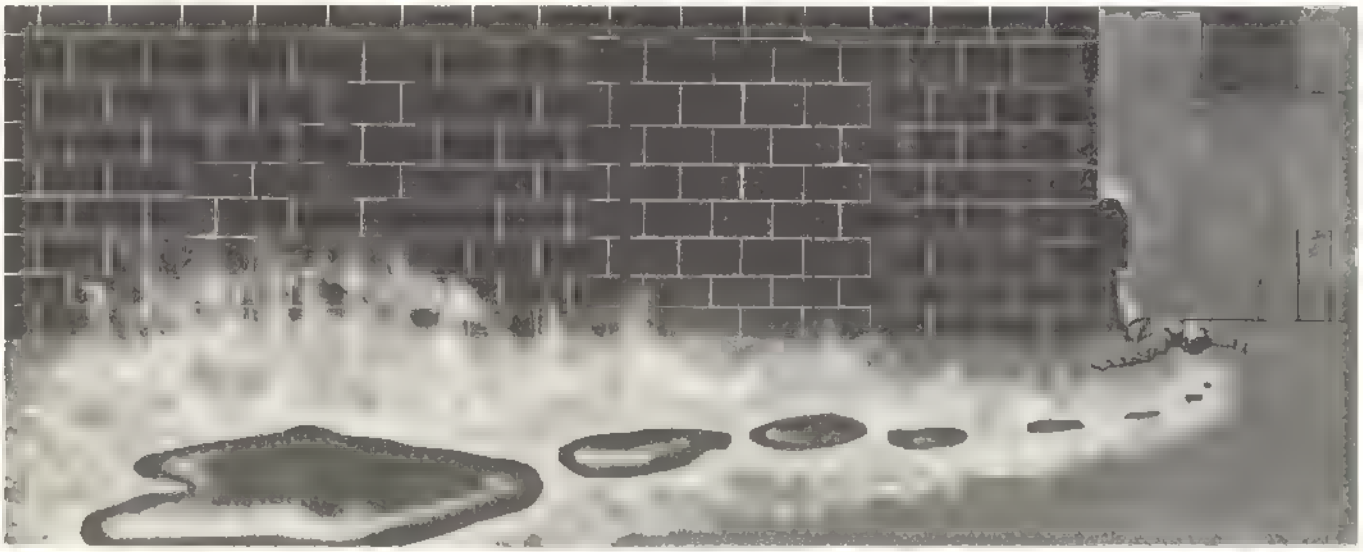








SYNOPSIS

Two earthmen – marine biologist *John Isaac* and submarine commander *Falco* – have been shanghaied by aliens who hunt whales across the reaches of space.

To prepare the prisoners for duty, *Captain Rotwang* turns them over to his ship's surgeons, enormous insects known as the *Xlexu*. The Xlexu strip Isaac of his skin, replacing it with a transparent membrane suited to the atmosphere within which he must now work. They also join the two sides of his brain, separate in most humans, giving him the ability to generate and release an immensely powerful *aura*. The Xlexu refer to this aura as Isaac's "new self" and advise him to awaken into it.

Falco has been decapitated, his body accidentally destroyed, and his intellect and emotions trapped within his head.

Rotwang has spent years hunting the great red mutant whale *Abraxas*, but when they clash, the whale triumphs as Rotwang's vessel burns and most of his crew is killed. Rotwang – stranded with Falco and the leopard/woman *Sphinx* aboard a spaceship run by giant aliens – swears to give Falco a new body if Falco finds a way to destroy Abraxas. Together they kill one of the aliens and with his corpse, space suit, and weapons, head for the whaling fleet.

Meanwhile, Isaac has been flung into the belly of Abraxas, where he meets an entire tribe of lunatic earthmen, all of whom have been altered by the Xlexu. When these people threaten Isaac's life, he releases his aura and awakens into... his soul. All of the others in the whale's belly die as Isaac, imitating the songs of the whale, makes contact and joins with the very soul of Abraxas.

ABRAXAS AND THE EARTHMAN

written and illustrated
by
RICK VEITCH

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAN AND WHALE

THE FLEET! WITH THE END OF ANOTHER HUNTING SEASON, THE GREAT WHALING SHIPS AND THEIR CREWS ASSEMBLE AT THE CUSTOMARY RENDEZVOUS POINT IN PREPARATION FOR THE LONG VOYAGE BACK TO THE HOME WORLD, KALIGHOUL...

SOME COME TO CELEBRATE VICTORIES OR MOURN LOSSES, AND SOME TO SWAP STORIES ABOUT THE BIG ONE THAT GOT AWAY...

...WHILE *OTHERS*, IT SEEMS, ARE DRIVEN BY *VENGEANCE!*

HEED ME, BROTHERS! I HAVE SUFFERED SHIPWRECK, MUTINY, AND DEPRIVATIONS OF *EVERY* KIND IN FINDING MY WAY *BACK* HERE TO YE...

AND IN SO DOING I HAVE SECURED THE *WEAPON* THAT WILL *END* ABRAXAS' DIABOLIC REIGN!

WE'LL DAMN WELL HAVE TO SEE THE *PROOF* BEFORE WE SAIL INTO THOSE JAWS AGAIN...

WE WANT AN END TO THAT RED-HORNED MENACE AS WELL AS *YE*, ROTWANG, BUT--

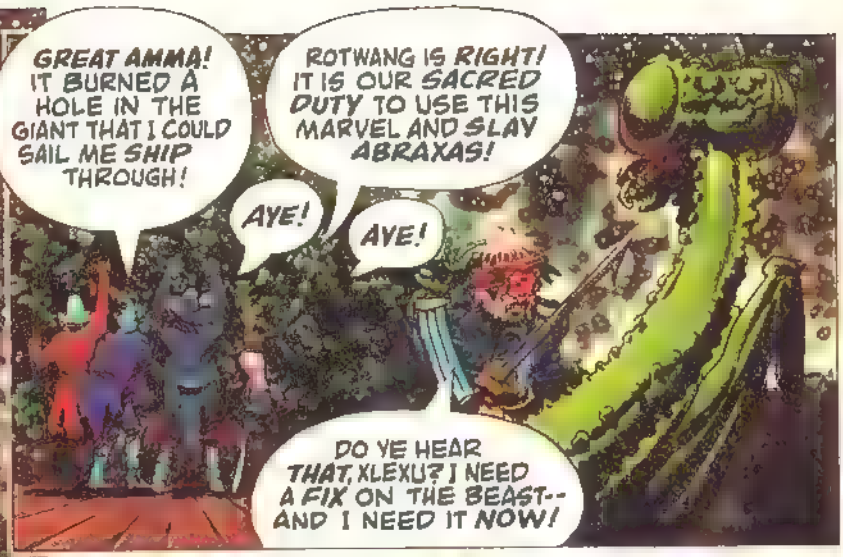
I DOUBT *THAT*, BROTHERS.

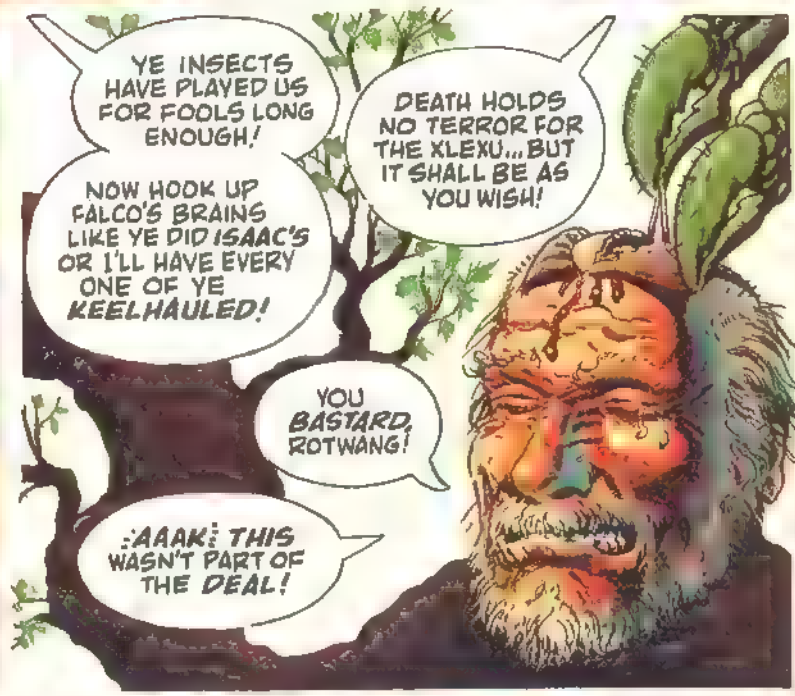
SO YE SHALL SEE THE *POWER* THAT PROVIDENCE HAS PLACED IN THE HANDS OF ROTWANG!

GUNNERS-- WE'VE A FINE TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY BEFORE US...

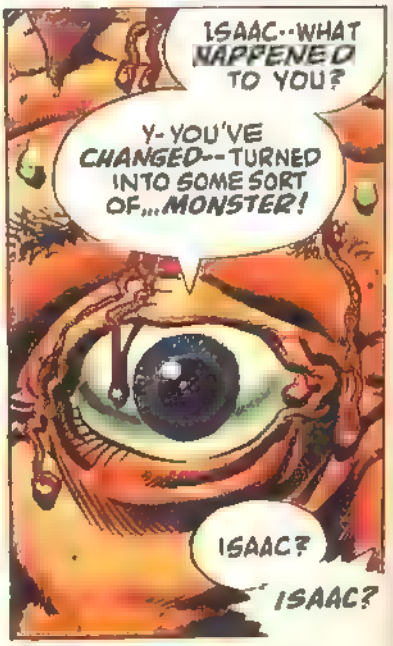
©1983 Rick Veitch

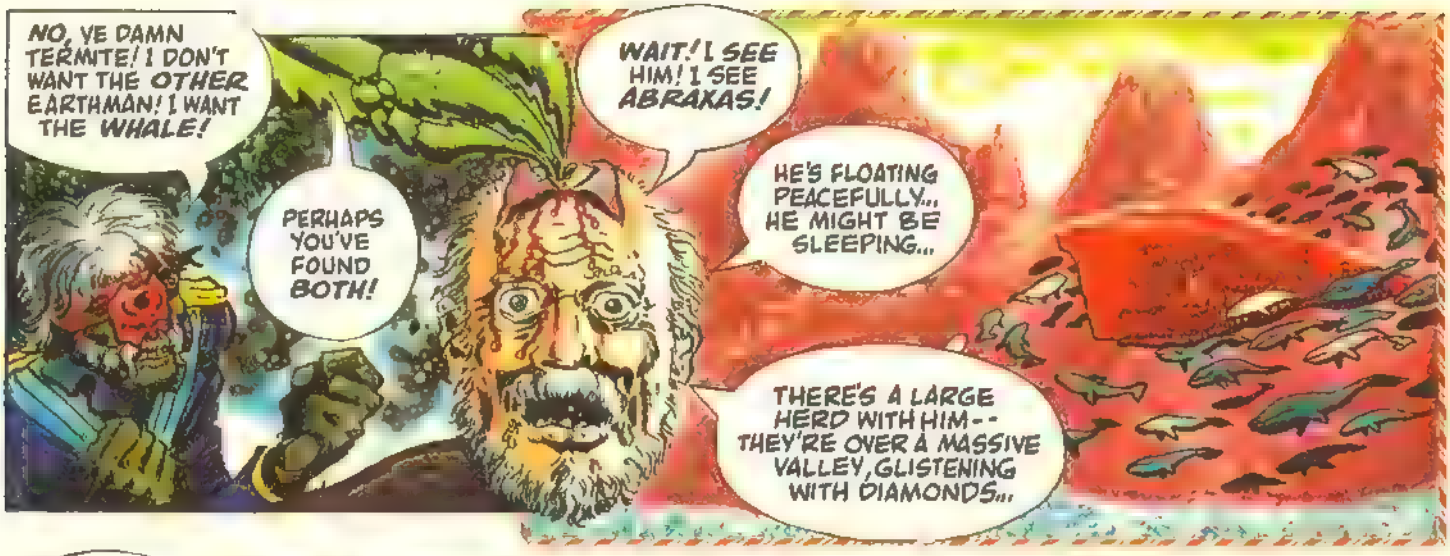
FIRE!
ZZIISH!


GREAT AMMA! IT BURNED A HOLE IN THE GIANT THAT I COULD SAIL ME SHIP THROUGH!
ROTWANG IS RIGHT! IT IS OUR SACRED DUTY TO USE THIS MARVEL AND SLAY ABRAXAS!
AYE!
AYE!
DO YE HEAR THAT, XLEXU? I NEED A FIX ON THE BEAST-- AND I NEED IT NOW!


YE INSECTS HAVE PLAYED US FOR FOOLS LONG ENOUGH!
NOW HOOK UP FALCO'S BRAINS LIKE YE DID ISAAC'S OR I'LL HAVE EVERY ONE OF YE KEELHAULED!
DEATH HOLDS NO TERROR FOR THE XLEXU... BUT IT SHALL BE AS YOU WISH!
YOU BASTARD, ROTWANG!
:AAAK: THIS WASN'T PART OF THE DEAL!

STOP IT! YOU'RE KILLING HIM!
BLAST YE, SPHINX-- THIS IS NONE OF YER BUSINESS!
THROW THIS INSOLENT SHE-CAT IN IRONS!
TAKE HEED, ROTWANG! FALCO HAS ENTERED THE VISIONARY STATE...
I-ISAAC?

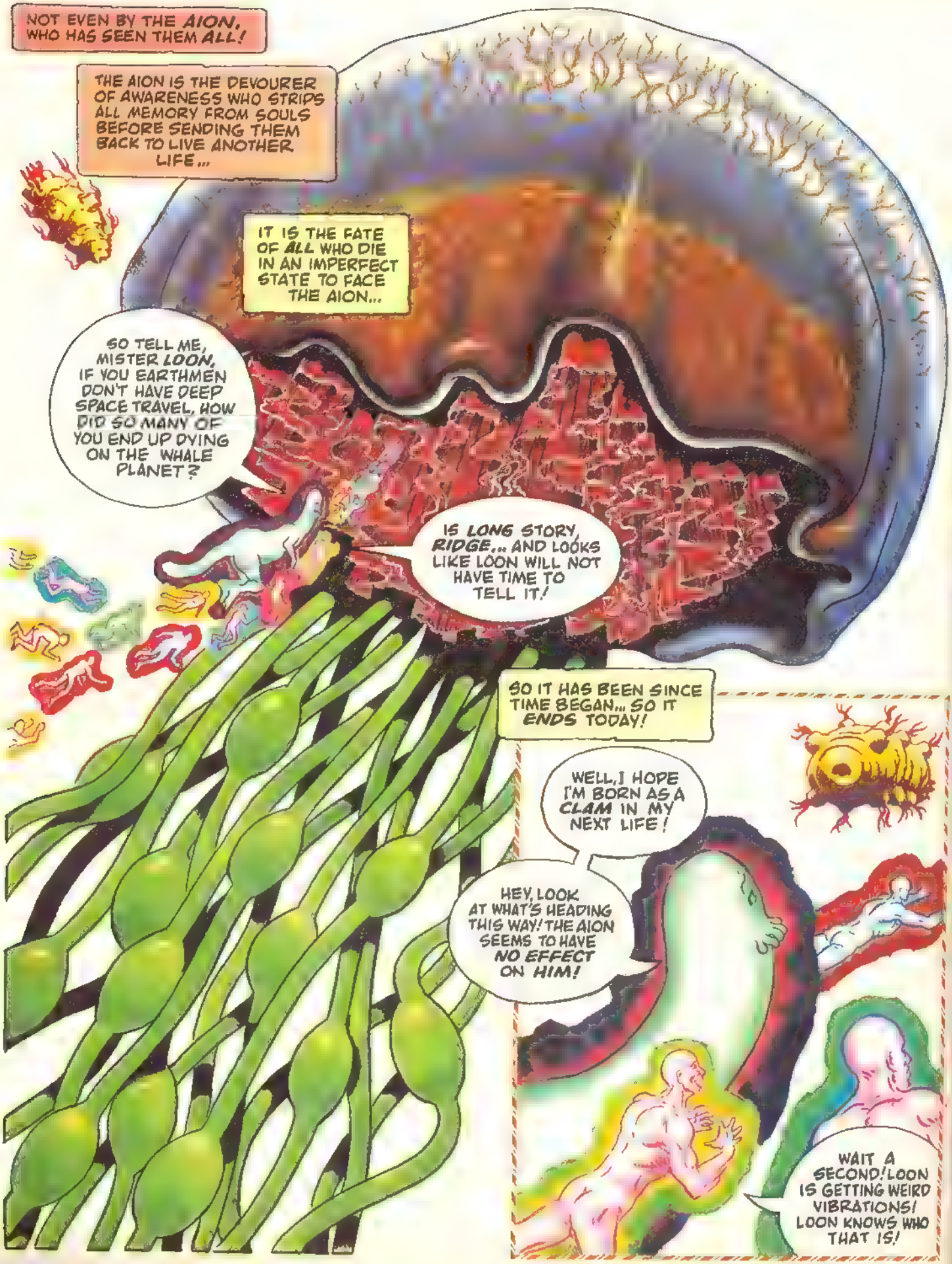

ISAAC--WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
Y-YOU'VE CHANGED--TURNED INTO SOME SORT OF... MONSTER!
ISAAC?
ISAAC?



WHILE IN THE FAR BEYOND, WE LOOK IN ON JUST WHAT IT WAS FALCO FIRST SAW WITH HIS ALTERED MIND...

NOTHING LESS THAN THE FINAL TRANSFORMATIVE SOUL STATE OF ISAAC AND ABRAXAS!

BEYOND THOUGHT, BEYOND EMOTION, MAN AND WHALE HAVE TRANSACTED INTO SOMETHING THAT HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN ON THIS SOULPLANE OR ANY OTHER...

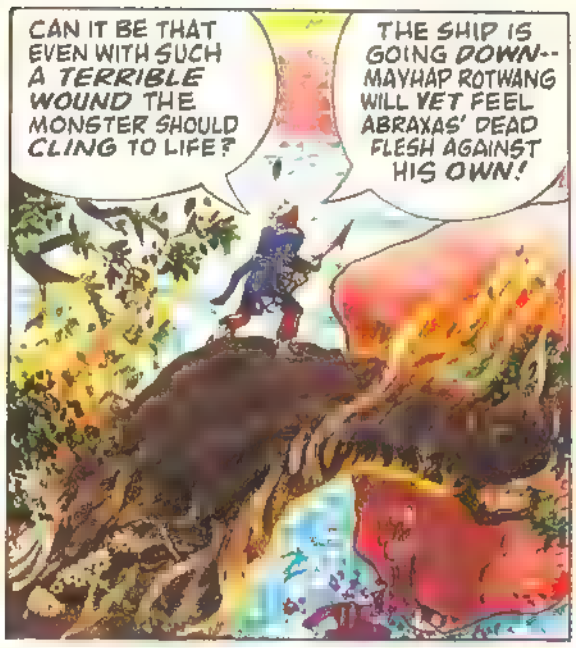

NOT EVEN BY THE AION, WHO HAS SEEN THEM ALL!
THE AION IS THE DEVOURER OF AWARENESS WHO STRIPS ALL MEMORY FROM SOULS BEFORE SENDING THEM BACK TO LIVE ANOTHER LIFE...
IT IS THE FATE OF ALL WHO DIE IN AN IMPERFECT STATE TO FACE THE AION...
SO TELL ME, MISTER LOON, IF YOU EARTHMEN DON'T HAVE DEEP SPACE TRAVEL, HOW DID SO MANY OF YOU END UP DYING ON THE WHALE PLANET?
IS LONG STORY, RIDGE... AND LOOKS LIKE LOON WILL NOT HAVE TIME TO TELL IT!
SO IT HAS BEEN SINCE TIME BEGAN... SO IT ENDS TODAY!
WELL, I HOPE I'M BORN AS A CLAM IN MY NEXT LIFE!
HEY, LOOK AT WHAT'S HEADING THIS WAY! THE AION SEEMS TO HAVE NO EFFECT ON HIM!
WAIT A SECOND! LOON IS GETTING WEIRD VIBRATIONS! LOON KNOWS WHO THAT IS!

FOR ISAAC AND ABRAXAS NOW EXERT TOTAL INFLUENCE ON ANY SOULS THAT HAVE DIED ON OR NEAR THE WHALE PLANET...
IT'S SELF!
AN INFLUENCE THAT CAN OVERCOME EVEN THE HUNGER OF THE AION!
AT LEAST LONG ENOUGH TO RETURN TO THE PHYSICAL PLANE AND ANCHOR EACH SOUL TO THAT OF A CONSENTING WHALE...
NOW PROTECTED FROM THE AION, THE SOULS OF MEN MERGE WITH THOSE OF WHALES AND A NEW RACE OF BEINGS IS BORN...
BARUMPION
REEEEEN
GROU
BWEE
BUT THEIR BIRTH ECSTACY IS SO OVERWHELMING THEY FAIL TO RECOGNIZE LURKING DANGER--
THEY STILL DON'T SEE US...
EASY... EASY...
WE GOT 'EM WHERE WE WANT 'EM! NOW LET 'EM HAVE IT!
ZZIIISH!
JUST SAVE THE RED DEVIL FOR ME!

HAIL, ABRAXAS!
WHAT MAD YEAST YE HAVE BREWED IN ROTWANG'S BRAIN! OH, THE MALIGNANT AGENCIES YE HAVE LEFT EATING UP ME INNARDS!
NO DOUBT YE THOUGHT ME LONG AGO CRUSHED...
WELL-- I HAVE RETURNED FOR MY POUND OF FLESH!
AND I'LL YET FEAST UPON YER GIBLET!
BY AMMA--LOOK AT HIM! HE RECOGNIZES ME!
HE'S MAKING HIS CHARGE! GUNNERS--
READY--
AIM--
FIRE!
HELL'S BELLS! WE GOT HIM!
ZZIISSHH!
HE'S GOING DOWN-- DOWN!
VENGEANCE IS MINE!
RRAAASSHH!

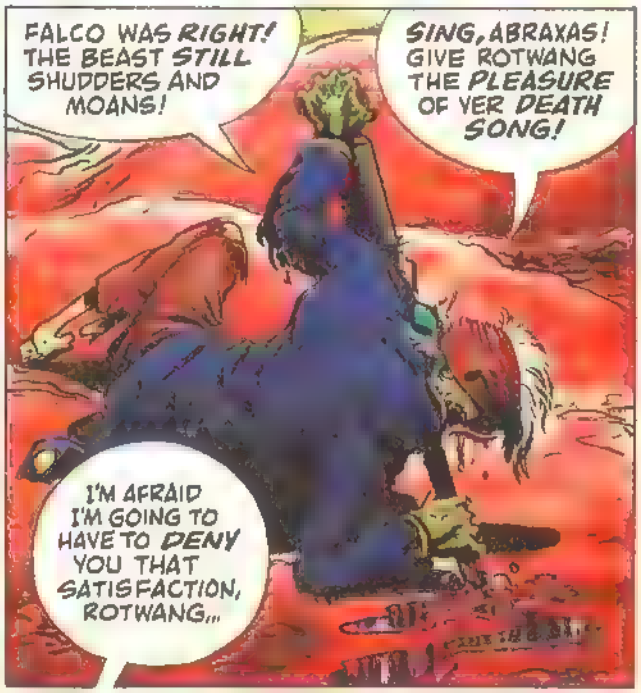
AND SO, ABRAXAS, THE HUNT FINALLY ENDS...
YE HAVE CRACKED MY SINEWS AND CAKED MY BRAIN, LEFT ME SCREAMING VENGEANCE THROUGH FOAM-GLUED LIPS...
BUT IT WAS WORTH IT ALL JUST TO SEE YE BROKEN AND BLEEDING ON DIAMOND FLOORS...
FOR AMMA'S SAKE, ROTWANG-- ARE YE BLIND TO WHAT'S HAPPENING ALL AROUND YE?
THESE WHALES ARE NOT NORMAL! SOMEHOW THEY CAN FOCUS THEIR SONGS AS WEAPONS!
THE VIBRATIONS ARE RUPTURING THE GRAVITY FURNACES! THE WHOLE FLEET IS ABLAZE! AAIIEE!
BWEE
BWEE
YE CAN ALL GO DOWN IN PERDITION'S FLAMES! ROTWANG'S VICTORY IS COMPLETE!
OH NO, IT ISN'T!
YOU HAVEN'T WON YET, YOU MINDLESS ANIMAL--
AND I'M GOING TO TEAR YOU LIMB FROM LIMB BEFORE YOU GET THE CHANCE!
YE DARE CHALLENGE MY TRIUMPH, MR. FALCO?
COULD THERE BE SOME COMPLAINT WITH THE ACCOMODATIONS I'VE FOUND YE?
SPHINX DIDN'T DESERVE THIS!
OWW!
SHE WAS THE MOST DECENT, LOVING BEING I EVER MET-- YOU SON OF A...
YER SLOW, FALCO! STILL GROGGY FROM THE ANESTHETIC!
AND NOT EVEN A MATCH FOR A ONE EYED PEGLEG!
AAK!

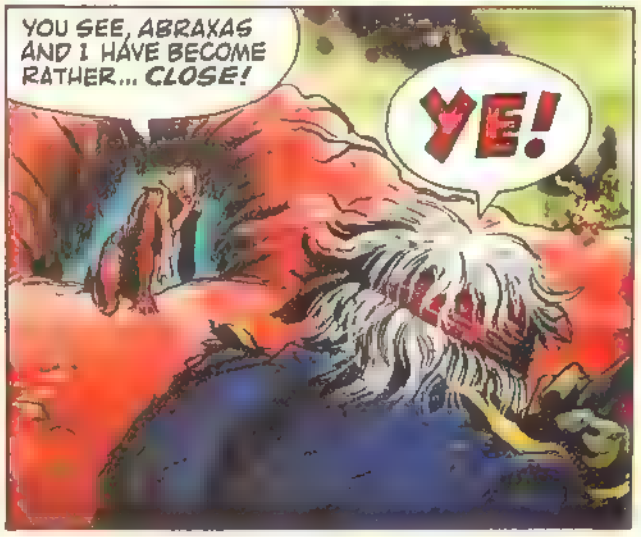
BUT WHAT IS ONE MORE MINOR CONQUEST TO THE SLAYER OF ABRAXAS!
UNNGH! YOU FORGET, ROTWANG...
I CAN STILL SENSE HIM!
ABRAXAS LIVES...


CAN IT BE THAT EVEN WITH SUCH A TERRIBLE WOUND THE MONSTER SHOULD CLING TO LIFE?
THE SHIP IS GOING DOWN-- MAYHAP ROTWANG WILL YET FEEL ABRAXAS' DEAD FLESH AGAINST HIS OWN!

HO, ABRAXAS!
IF YE STILL LIVE, THEN IT IS ONLY FITTING...

... THAT ROTWANG'S OWN HARPOON SEVERS THE FINAL CORDS!


FALCO WAS RIGHT! THE BEAST STILL SHUDDERS AND MOANS!
SING, ABRAXAS! GIVE ROTWANG THE PLEASURE OF YER DEATH SONG!
I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DENY YOU THAT SATISFACTION, ROTWANG...

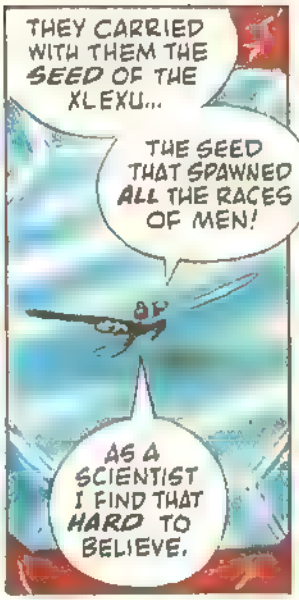

YOU SEE, ABRAXAS AND I HAVE BECOME RATHER... CLOSE!
YE!

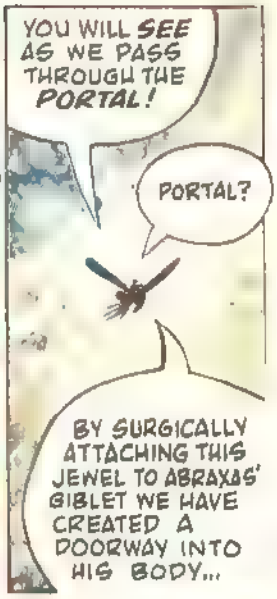
HOW BE IT YE COME SCRAMBLIN' OUT OF ABRAXAS' BLOW-HOLE?
IT'S THE XLEXU'S DOING. THEY HELPED THE WHALE AND ME MERGE INTO A SYMBIOTIC ENTITY!
YOUR ATTACK FORCED THAT ENTITY INTO THIS BODY...
RIGHT NOW, I AM ABRAXAS!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YE'RE BLATHERING ABOUT, BUT...
IF KILLIN' YE WILL FINISH THE JOB THEN I'M ALL FOR IT!
STAND STILL, BLAST YE!
I HAVE TO ADMIRE YOUR RESOURCEFULNESS THOUGH--THAT LASER CANNON CAME VERY CLOSE TO KILLING US...
XLEXU SURGEONS! HOW...?
FORTUNATELY, MEDICAL HELP HAS ARRIVED IN TIME!
THE ONLY SURVIVORS OF YOUR FLEET, ROTWANG.
IT'S A NASTY WOUND AND BELIEVE ME, IT HURTS A LOT--BUT I BET IT WAS PART OF THE XLEXU'S PLANS!
PLANS? W-WHAT PLANS?
I'M NOT SURE MYSELF. ALL I KNOW IS THAT ABRAXAS AND I ARE THE CULMINATION OF A LONG SERIES OF EVENTS...
EVENTS IN WHICH THE WHALING FLEET PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE...
SOMEONE HAD TO KEEP TRANSPORTING EARTHMEN TO ABRAXAS UNTIL ONE OF US SUCCEEDED IN THE MERGER.
HELL'S BELLS! THAT'S WHAT MY VISION MEANT?
WHAT AMAZES ME IS HOW THE XLEXU COULD ALMOST COUNT ON THE MURDEROUS WAY YOU EXERCIZED YOUR FREE WILL!
IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO REPENT, ROTWANG.

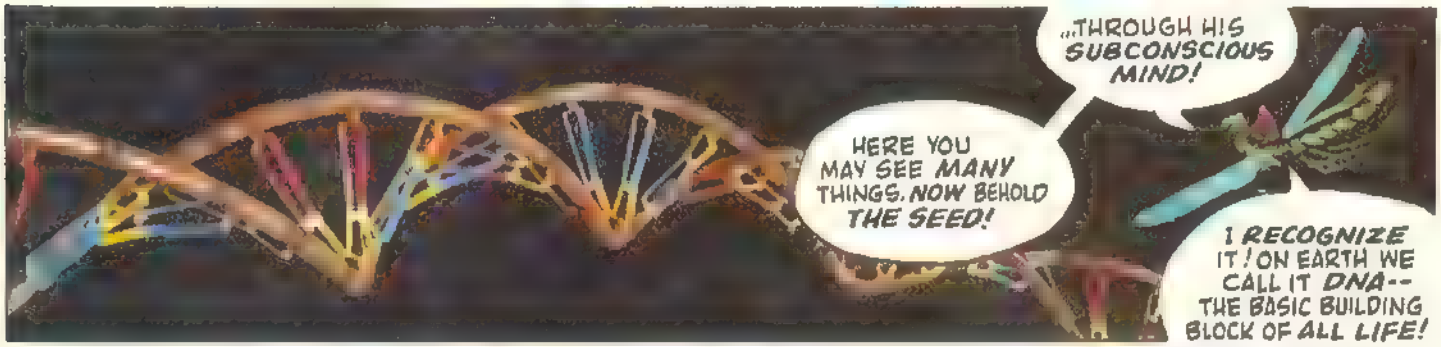
REPENT? BAH! I HAVE THE POWER TO WOUND YE YET--
IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN THE XLEXU CAN DO TO SEW THIS SKIN BACK ON YE NOW! HAR HAR!
EXCEPT THE SKIN IS MEANINGLESS TO ME NOW...
YOU SEE, I'VE FOUND THERE IS MUCH MORE TO A MAN THAN MERE FLESH!
UNNGH-- GAAAK!
IT'S A MAN'S SOUL THAT FINALLY DEFINES WHAT HE IS!
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE REAL YOU, ROTWANG?
YOUR UNENDING CRUELTY HAS LEFT YOU TARNISHED AND SOILED...
THE ONLY WAY TO SCRUB CLEAN IS TO SURRENDER YOURSELF TO THAT!
NO! PLEASE...
NO!
NOOOO
BUT DON'T WORRY, ROTWANG, THE AION LOVES ALL SOULS EQUALLY...
...EVEN YOURS!

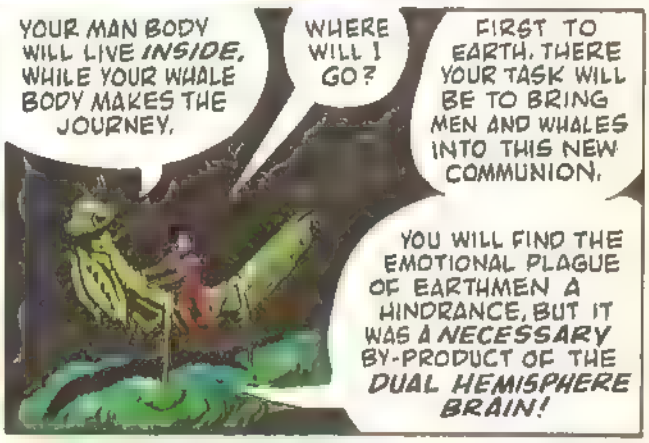
AS ROTWANG'S FINAL SCREAMS ECHO AND FADE DOWN THE ENDLESS CORRIDORS OF ETERNITY, ABRAXAS ONCE AGAIN TAKES TO THE SKY...
WHERE HE MEETS SOME OLD FRIENDS IN SOME NEW GUISES...
HO, ISAAC! IT'S ME--STAUB! I'VE BEEN TO THE AION AND SAVED A FEW FROM SHARING ROTWANG'S FATE--JUST LIKE YE SAVED US!
HI, KITTEN--LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE THE BIG HERO!
MY BOY, YOU'VE MADE THE DISCOVERY OF THE AGE!
FALCO! SPHINX! IS IT GOOD TO SEE YOU TWO!
WELL, FALCO, OUR ADVENTURE ISN'T OVER YET! IN FACT, ITS ONLY STARTING!
UH, WELL... ER...
SORRY, KITTEN, BUT I THINK FALCO NEEDS A REST!
HE AND I ARE GOING TO SETTLE DOWN HERE WITH THE WHALES--AND WHO KNOWS...?
MAYBE RAISE A LITTLE FAMILY?
YOU FOLKS ENJOY YOURSELVES!
YOU'VE EARNED IT!
AND WHO ARE YOU TWO?
I'M MONA AND THIS IS MY FRIEND, BOZE.
WE WERE ABANDONED!
YEAH... OUR DATE LEFT US TO DIE IN OUTER SPACE!
OH, YOU MEAN THAT BIG GUY? HE'S RIGHT OVER THERE IN THAT FINBACK!
RIDGE? HERE?
YOO HOO! RIDGE--IT'S US!!
QUICK, MONA! GRAB A WHALE!
DON'T RUN AWAY NOW! WE WANT TO PLAY!
OOOH SHIIIITT!

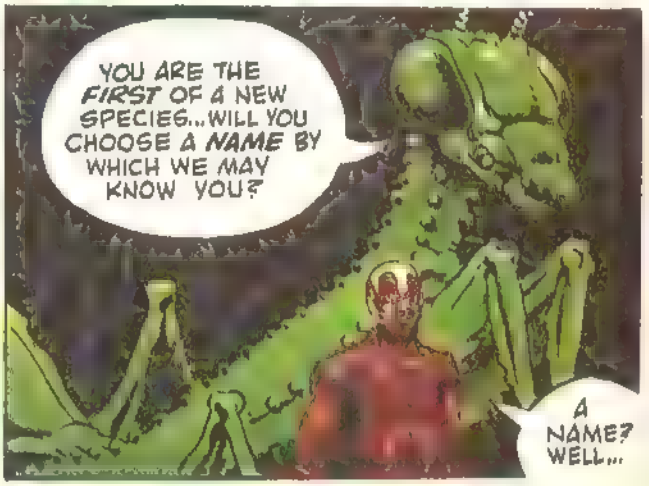
ISAAC IS SOARING ON XLEXU WINGS...











CALL ME ISHMAEL.
BACK ON EARTH THE WHALES ARE SINGING:
We sing.
And we sing loud.
The song fills our hearts,
even after millennia
of hard singing and sounding
in the Zones of the Sea.
We came to this Earth
during the Great Migration,
when the folk of the Whale Planet
colonized the galaxy.
But here the gravity enslaved us,
dragging us down from the sky,
to vibrate sounds
in the Zones of the Sea.
On and on it goes.
It is life.
It is dream.
It is exquisite mirage.
But not until a man from Earth
journeys to the Whale Planet
and meets Abraxas,
will we be delivered
from the Zones of the Sea.
SPECIAL THANKS TO: TOM VEITCH STEVE BISSETTE AND CINDY LESZCZAK
VEITCH 1982 ©

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INDEED, ALL THINGS CHANGE, BUT I'M REALLY NOT SURE WHY THEY LEFT WHEN THEY DID. YOU SEE, LAD, THERE WAS STILL AMPLE ENERGY... MANY OF THE MONITORS ARE STILL FUNCTIONING FROM POWER CELLS, EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME.

...SECONDARY SENSORS ACTIVATED... ≠beep≠ IMPLOSION BOMB ARMED... AWAITING CONFIRMATION... ≠beep≠
MY THEORY IS THAT THIS WAS A MILITARY INSTALLATION BUILT FOR A WAR THAT NEVER TOOK PLACE.
SO WHAT WAS THE POINT? IT TOOK A HECKUVA LOT OF MAN HOURS TO BUILD THIS PLACE. PROBABLY KEPT SOME ALIEN ECONOMY GOING FOR A FEW MONTHS.

LOOK, DOCTOR, TRACKING SCREENS STILL SCAN THE LOCAL SECTOR FOR SHIPS THAT RUSTED CENTURIES AGO. THIS STATION IS JUST A MEANING-LESS RELIC!

COME, NOW, EVERY REMNANT OF PAST TIMES AND PEOPLES CAN STILL HAVE RELEVANCE FOR US TODAY.
≥beep≤... ALIEN PRESENCE CONFIRMED ... BASE WILL DESTRUCT IN NINE MINUTES... ≥ beep≤

CONSIDER IT AN OMEN. WHEN A WANDERING SAMURAI SLAUGHTERED ONE OF THE DRAGONS, THE PEACE OF THE VALLEY WAS AT AN END. THIS WANTON KILLING WAS WITNESSED BY MASANOBU MATSUMURA, ONCE A RENOWNED SWORDSMAN. NOW A SEEKER AFTER THE WAY.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, A YOUNG PRIEST NAMED HOKAN DISCOVERED THAT OTHERS OF HIS ORDER WERE TRAINING THE GENTLE DRAGONS IN THE METHODS OF VIOLENCE. HE RETURNED TO THE TEMPLE IN TIME TO SEE THE LEADER OF THE DISSIDENT PRIESTS, SHONIN, PRESIDE OVER THE WHOLESALE MURDER OF ALL WHO REFUSED HIS LEADERSHIP.

HE ESCAPED INTO THE FOREST WHERE HE HAD A MYSTIC VISION. IT WAS REVEALED TO HIM THAT A CLAN OF NINJA WOULD DELIVER THE DRAGONS FROM THE CORRUPTION OF THE DISSIDENT PRIESTS. THEREFORE, HE NOW GOES TO SEEK THEM OUT.

WE DO NOT DO OUR WORK FOR NOTHING, LITTLE MAN.

I CAN PAY. I HAVE A GOLD AMULET--

--IN THE SHAPE OF...

WE SEE. THIS WILL PURCHASE THE SERVICES OF THREE OF OUR NUMBER FOR A FORTNIGHT. WE ARE YOURS TO COMMAND.

HOKAN DECIDES TO ALSO TRY TO ENLIST THE AID OF MASANOBU ...EVEN THOUGH IT MEANS RETURNING TO DANGEROUS COUNTRY...

THERE HE IS.

HE WILL NOT ELUDE US AGAIN.

SO, HOKAN, YOU RETURN TO OUR FOLD.

WELCOME.

AGONIZED HOURS LATER...

NO MORE! I... I WILL TALK!

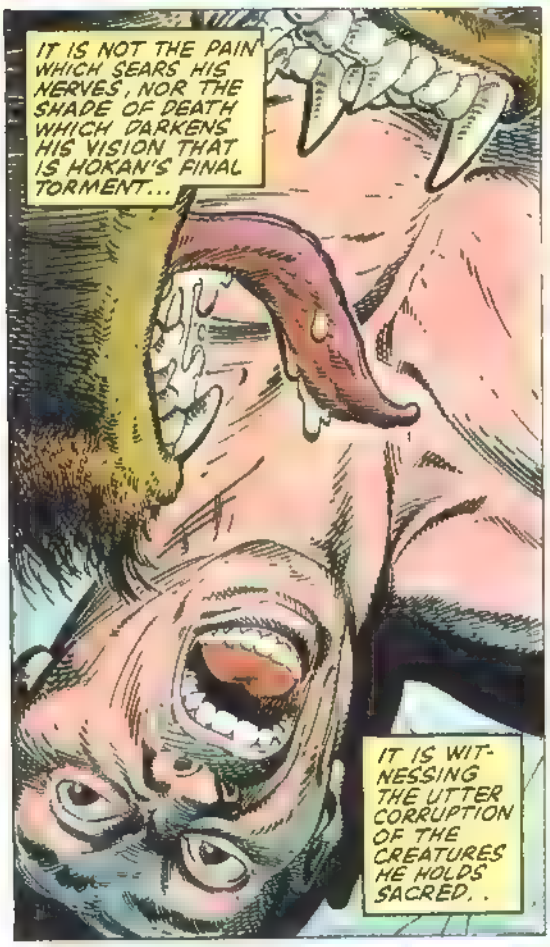
I HAVE HIRED THE NINJA TO... COMBAT Y-YOU.

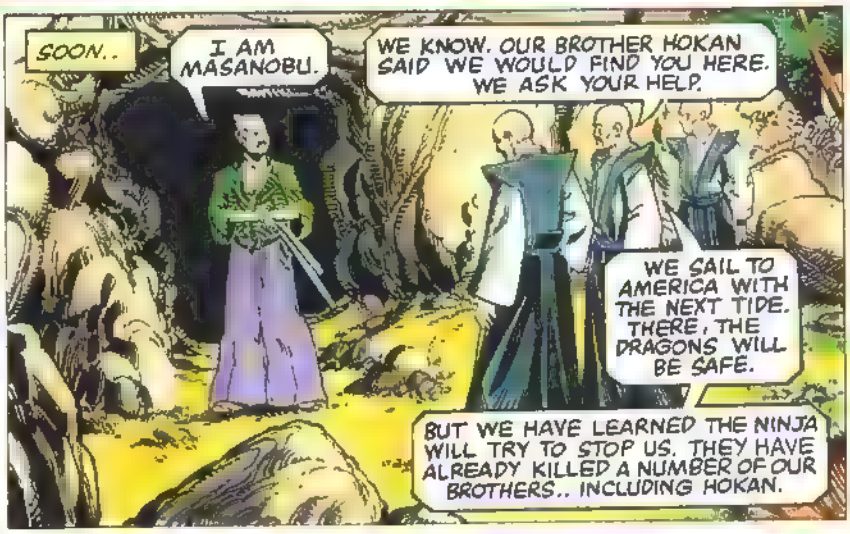
AND WHO *ELSE* HAVE YOU BLATHERED TO?

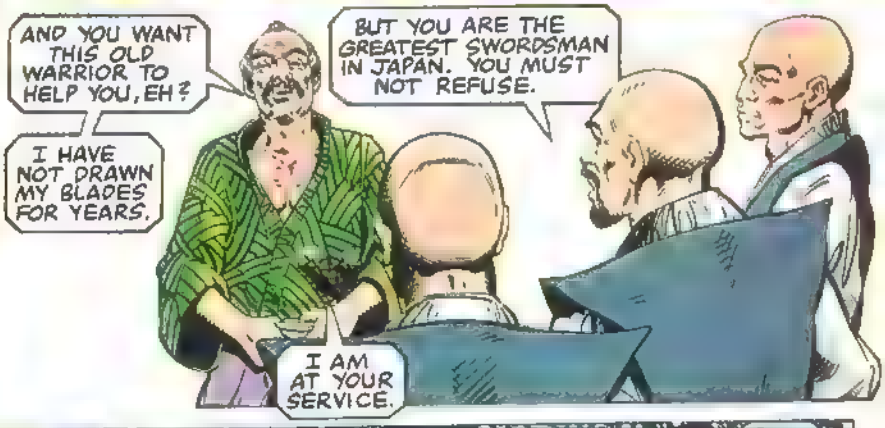
THE SAMURAI MASANOBU... LIVES IN A CAVE ON THE HILLSIDE...

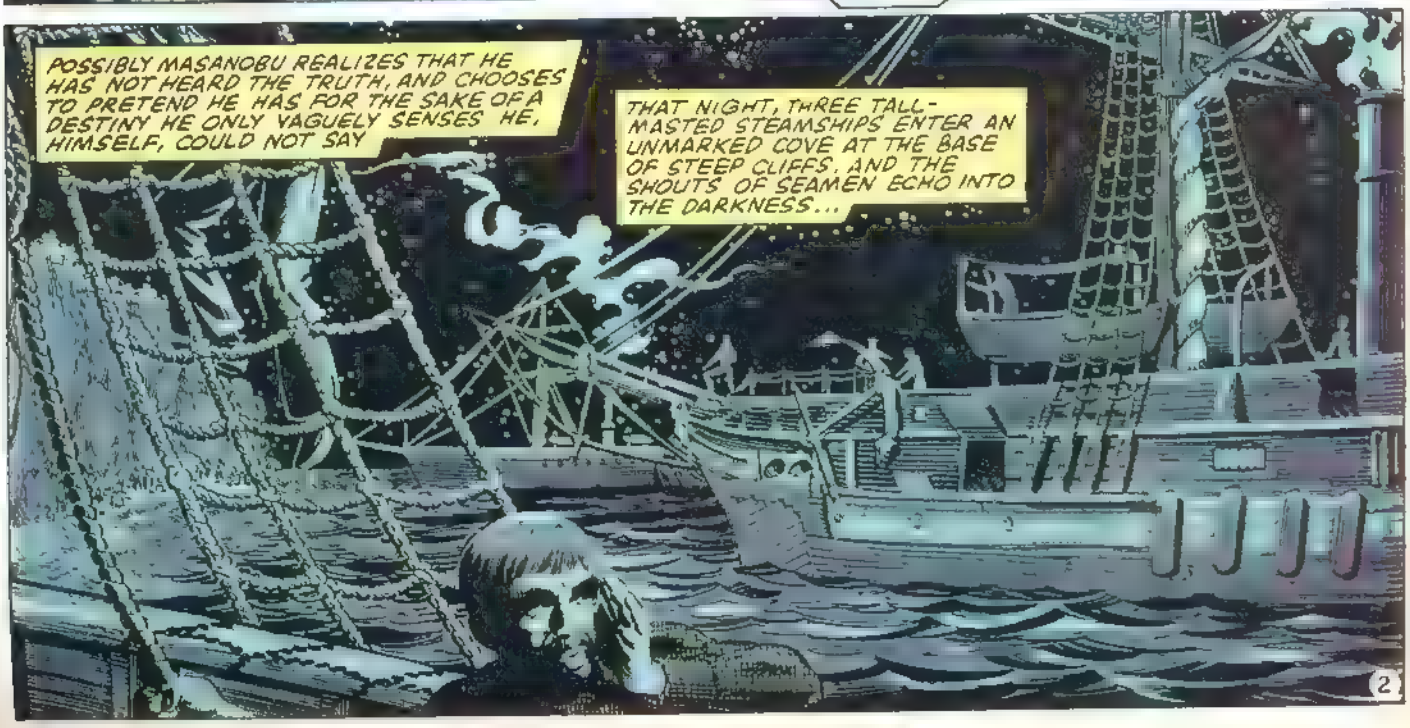
© 1985 Carl Potts

HE HAS TOLD US ALL.
THEN LET HIM JOIN HIS ANCESTORS.
BRING YOUR PET. IT IS TIME WE TESTED HIM ON HIS LESSONS.

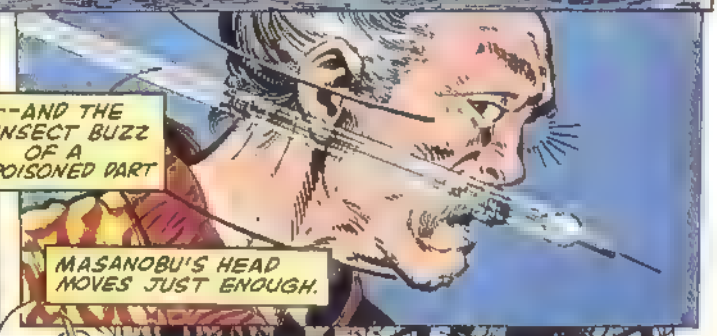

IT IS NOT THE PAIN WHICH SEARS HIS NERVES, NOR THE SHADE OF DEATH WHICH DARKENS HIS VISION THAT IS HOKAN'S FINAL TORMENT...
IT IS WITNESSING THE UTTER CORRUPTION OF THE CREATURES HE HOLDS SACRED..


SOON..
I AM MASANOBU.
WE KNOW. OUR BROTHER HOKAN SAID WE WOULD FIND YOU HERE. WE ASK YOUR HELP.
WE SAIL TO AMERICA WITH THE NEXT TIDE. THERE, THE DRAGONS WILL BE SAFE.
BUT WE HAVE LEARNED THE NINJA WILL TRY TO STOP US. THEY HAVE ALREADY KILLED A NUMBER OF OUR BROTHERS.. INCLUDING HOKAN.

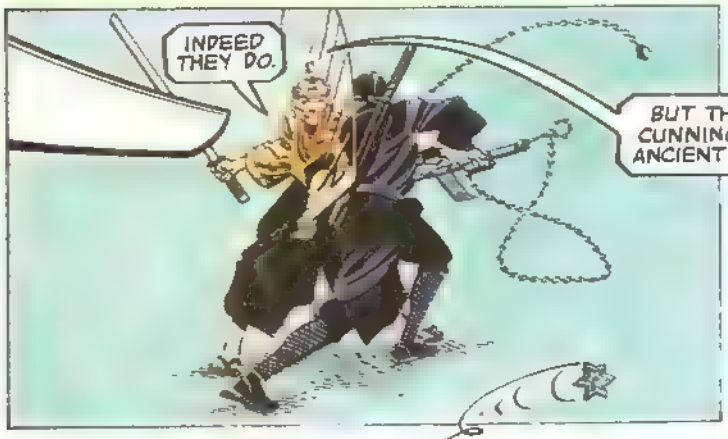

AND YOU WANT THIS OLD WARRIOR TO HELP YOU, EH?
I HAVE NOT DRAWN MY BLADES FOR YEARS.
BUT YOU ARE THE GREATEST SWORDSMAN IN JAPAN. YOU MUST NOT REFUSE.
I AM AT YOUR SERVICE.


POSSIBLY MASANOBU REALIZES THAT HE HAS NOT HEARD THE TRUTH, AND CHOOSES TO PRETEND HE HAS FOR THE SAKE OF A DESTINY HE ONLY VAGUELY SENSES HE, HIMSELF, COULD NOT SAY
THAT NIGHT, THREE TALL-MASTED STEAMSHIPS ENTER AN UNMARKED COVE AT THE BASE OF STEEP CLIFFS, AND THE SHOUTS OF SEAMEN ECHO INTO THE DARKNESS...

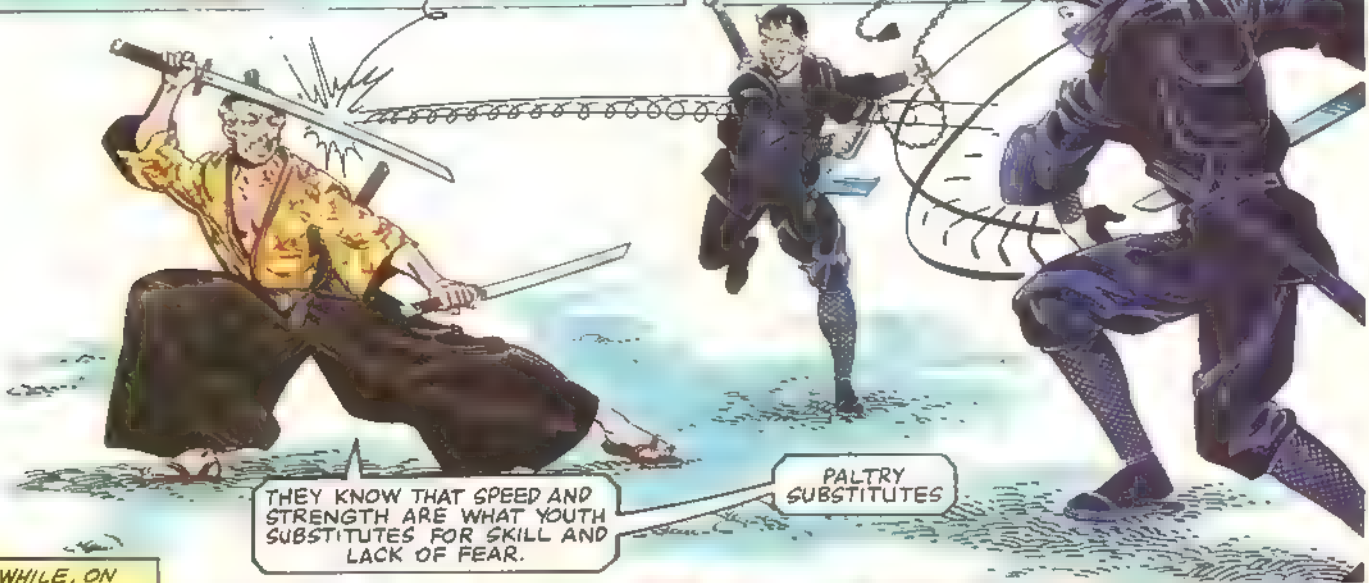
WITHIN THREE HOURS, THE TASK IS COMPLETED. YOUNG DRAGONS AND CRATES CONTAINING EGGS OF THE SPLENDID BEASTS ARE LOWERED INTO HOLDS, AND HATCHES ARE FASTENED OVER THEM. THE SEA SIGHS, AS THOUGH RELIEVED, AND THE BREEZE IS FLAVORED WITH A SUDDEN CHILL.



YOU DO NOT NEED ME.
FOR THAT OLD MAN? NO. WE'LL JOIN YOU BELOW
HE WAS IN HIS DOTAGE WHEN THE MOON WAS A PUP. HIS BONES CREAK.

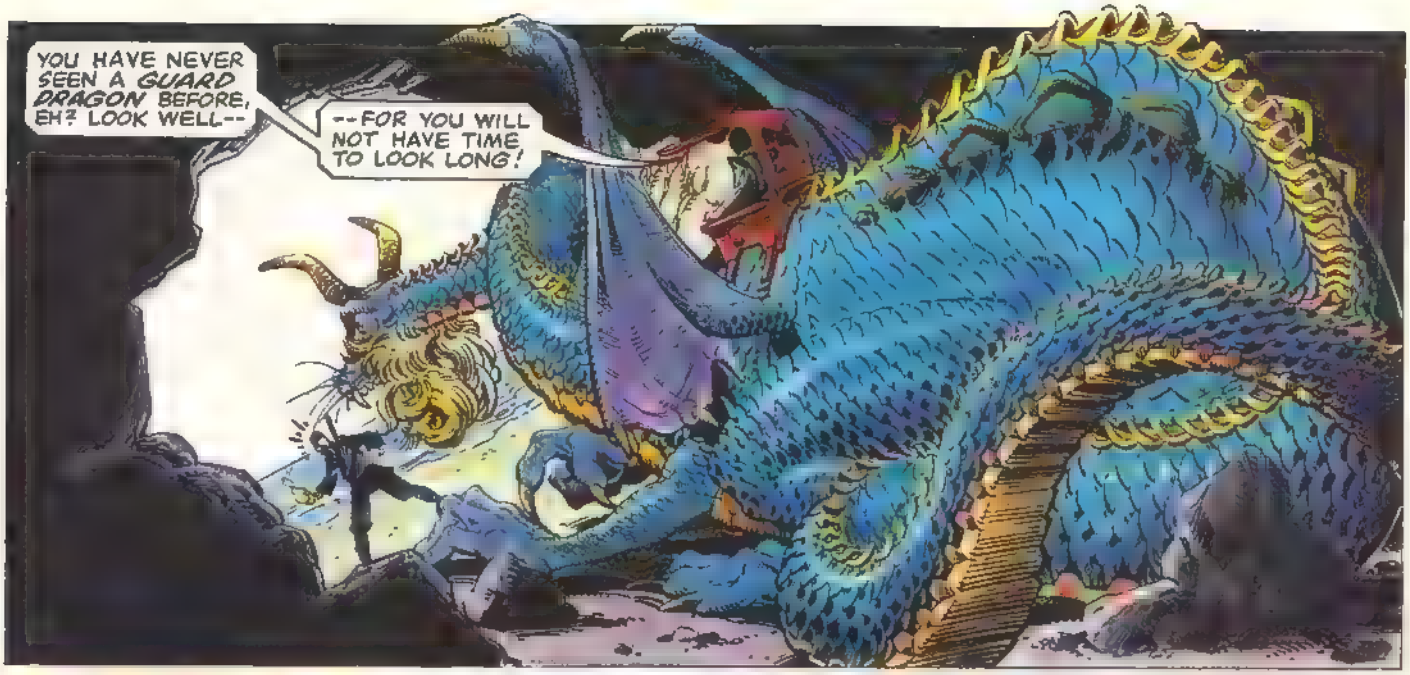

INDEED THEY DO.
BUT THEY ARE CUNNING, THESE ANCIENT BONES--

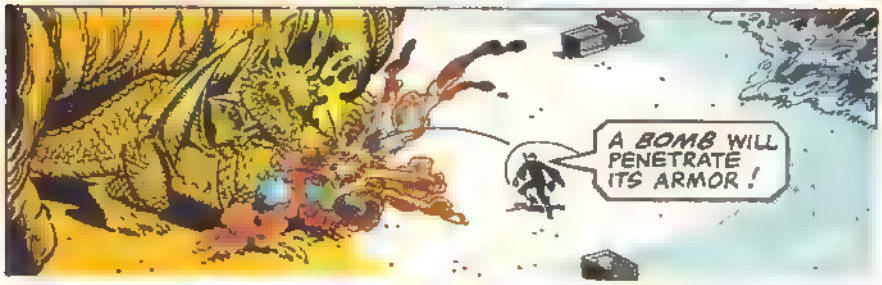
--AND THEY REMEMBER A THOUSAND BATTLES


THEY KNOW THAT SPEED AND STRENGTH ARE WHAT YOUTH SUBSTITUTES FOR SKILL AND LACK OF FEAR.
PALTRY SUBSTITUTES

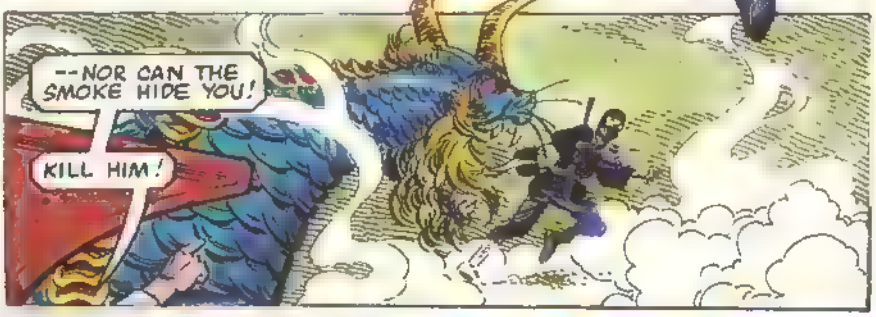
WHILE, ON THE BEACH...
THIS FIRE BOTTLE WILL TURN THE SHIPS INTO TORCHES--

EH--?
DISBELIEF AND TERROR THROB IN HIS SOUL...

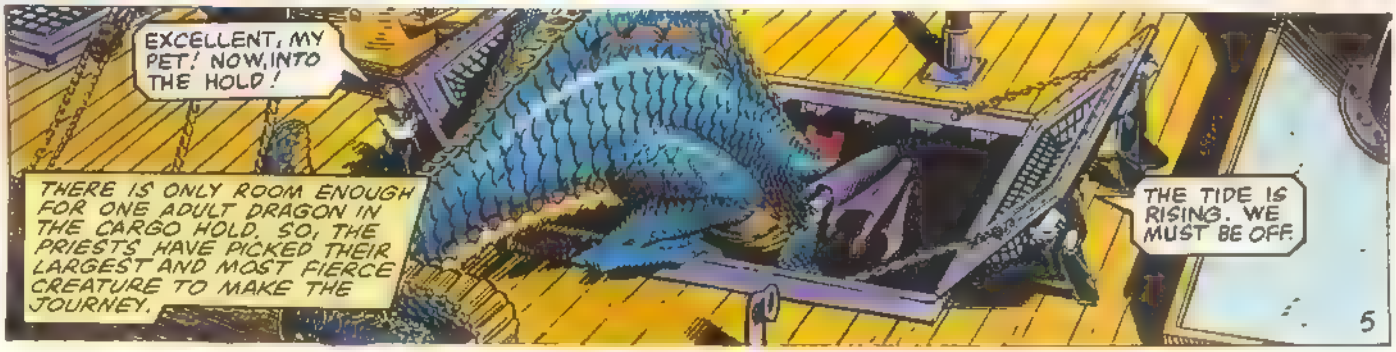

YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN A GUARD DRAGON BEFORE, EH? LOOK WELL--
--FOR YOU WILL NOT HAVE TIME TO LOOK LONG!

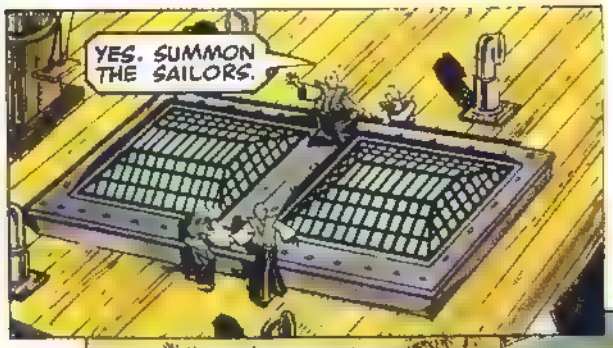

A BOMB WILL PENETRATE ITS ARMOR!

NOT SUCH A PUNY ONE--

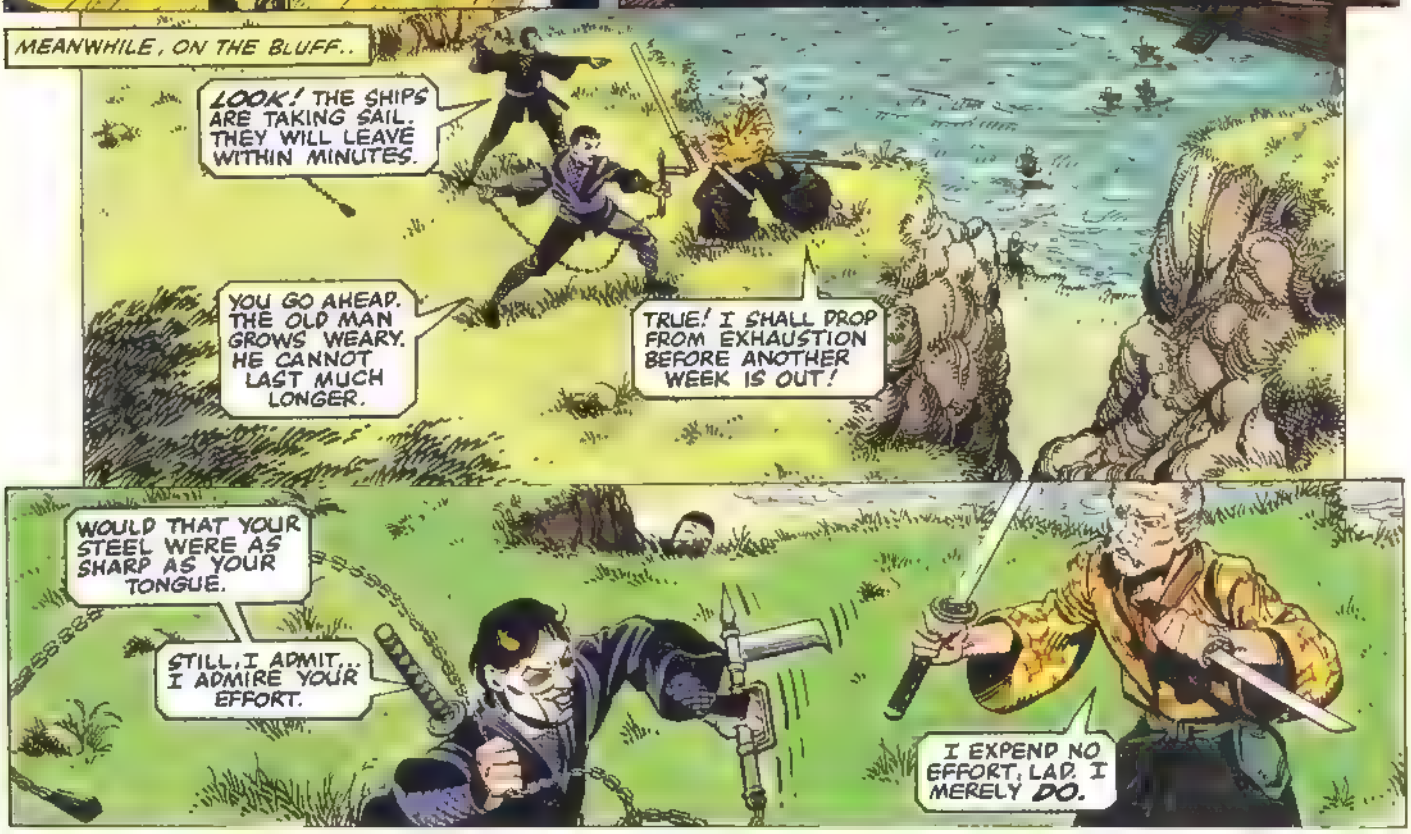

--NOR CAN THE SMOKE HIDE YOU!
KILL HIM!

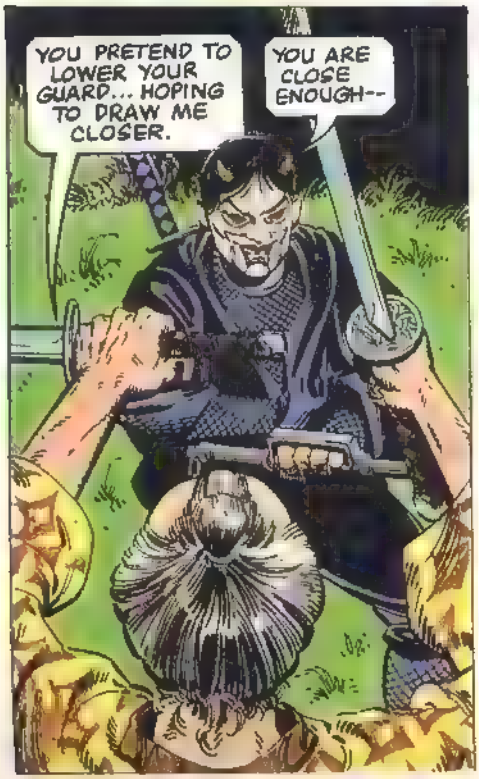
THE NINJA HAS COURAGE HE MANAGES NOT TO SCREAM


EXCELLENT, MY PET! NOW, INTO THE HOLD!
THERE IS ONLY ROOM ENOUGH FOR ONE ADULT DRAGON IN THE CARGO HOLD. SO, THE PRIESTS HAVE PICKED THEIR LARGEST AND MOST FIERCE CREATURE TO MAKE THE JOURNEY.
THE TIDE IS RISING. WE MUST BE OFF.


YES. SUMMON THE SAILORS.

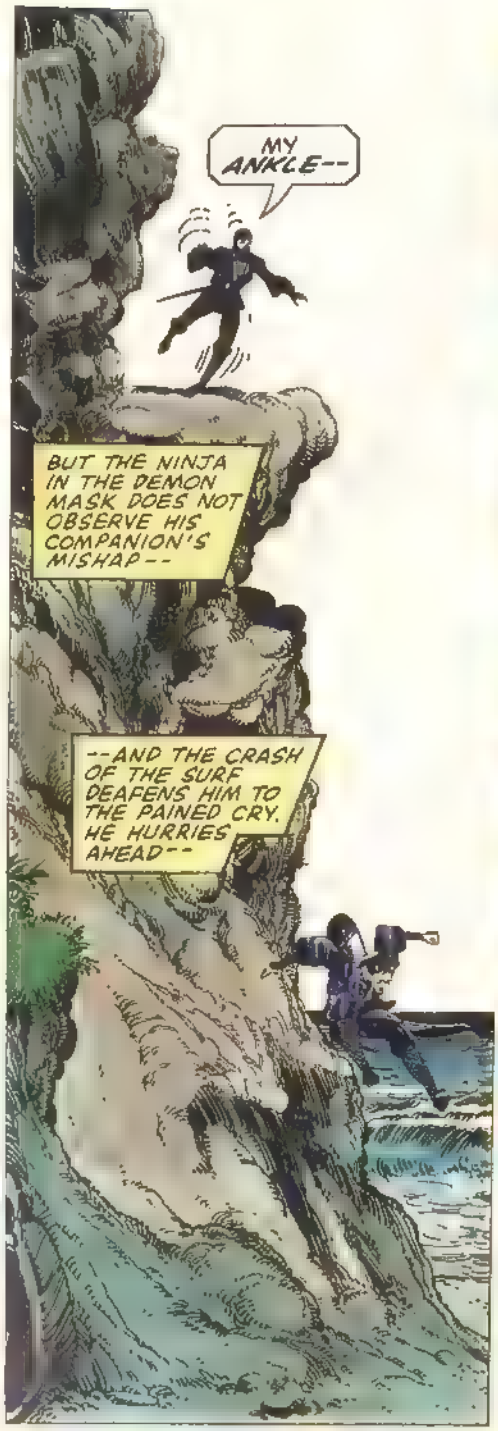
STEP LIVELY. AMERICA IS WAITING.

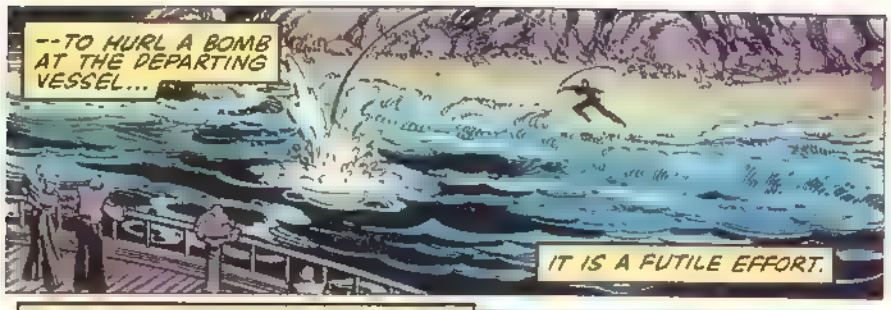

MEANWHILE, ON THE BLUFF..
LOOK! THE SHIPS ARE TAKING SAIL. THEY WILL LEAVE WITHIN MINUTES.
YOU GO AHEAD. THE OLD MAN GROWS WEARY. HE CANNOT LAST MUCH LONGER.
TRUE! I SHALL DROP FROM EXHAUSTION BEFORE ANOTHER WEEK IS OUT!
WOULD THAT YOUR STEEL WERE AS SHARP AS YOUR TONGUE.
STILL, I ADMIT... I ADMIRE YOUR EFFORT.
I EXPEND NO EFFORT, LAD. I MERELY DO.

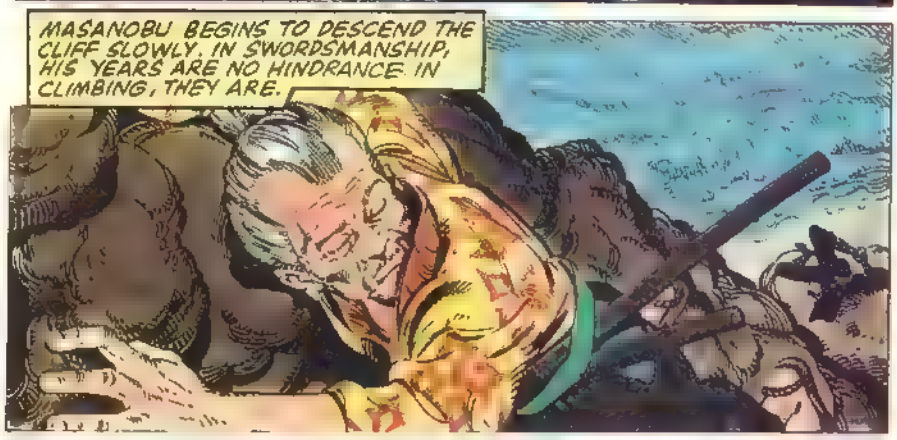

YOU PRETEND TO LOWER YOUR GUARD... HOPING TO DRAW ME CLOSER.
YOU ARE CLOSE ENOUGH--

--FOR THIS!
POWDER... BLINDING ME!

A NINJA TRICK. HE FLED WHILE I COULD NOT SEE.


MY ANKLE--
BUT THE NINJA IN THE DEMON MASK DOES NOT OBSERVE HIS COMPANION'S MISHAP--
--AND THE CRASH OF THE SURF DEAFENS HIM TO THE PAINED CRY. HE HURRIES AHEAD--


--TO HURL A BOMB AT THE DEPARTING VESSEL...
IT IS A FUTILE EFFORT.


MASANOBU BEGINS TO DESCEND THE CLIFF SLOWLY. IN SWORDSMANSHIP, HIS YEARS ARE NO HINDRANCE. IN CLIMBING, THEY ARE.

NO USE. THE SHIPS HAVE STEAM AND SAIL BOTH. I HAVE ONLY MY ARM.

AND...
NINJAS ARE NOT CAPTURED.
NINJAS DIE.
THE BLADE SLIDES HOME

THE LAST OF THE DRAGONS continues next issue

IN SLEEP, I FIND NO PEACE. THE DREAMS ALWAYS COME. TO MOCK AND NAG, TO URGE AND PROD. TO ROB ME OF EVEN THE SMALL BLESSING OF OBLIVION. THEY BIND ME TO MY JOURNEY THROUGH THIS WORLD I HATE, FORCING ME ON THOUGH I DO NOT KNOW WHEN I BEGAN, WHERE I WILL END; IF I SEARCH, OR IF I FLEE. ONCE, I WAS MORE, I'M CERTAIN. BUT NOW, MY LIFE, MY MEMORIES, ARE ONLY THE JOURNEY.

IF THE DREAMS KNOW MORE, THEY WILL NOT TELL. THEY MERELY PUSH ME TO WAKE, TO RISE, TO JOURNEY AGAIN...

WANDERER

by Michael Kaluta
scripted by Archie Goodwin

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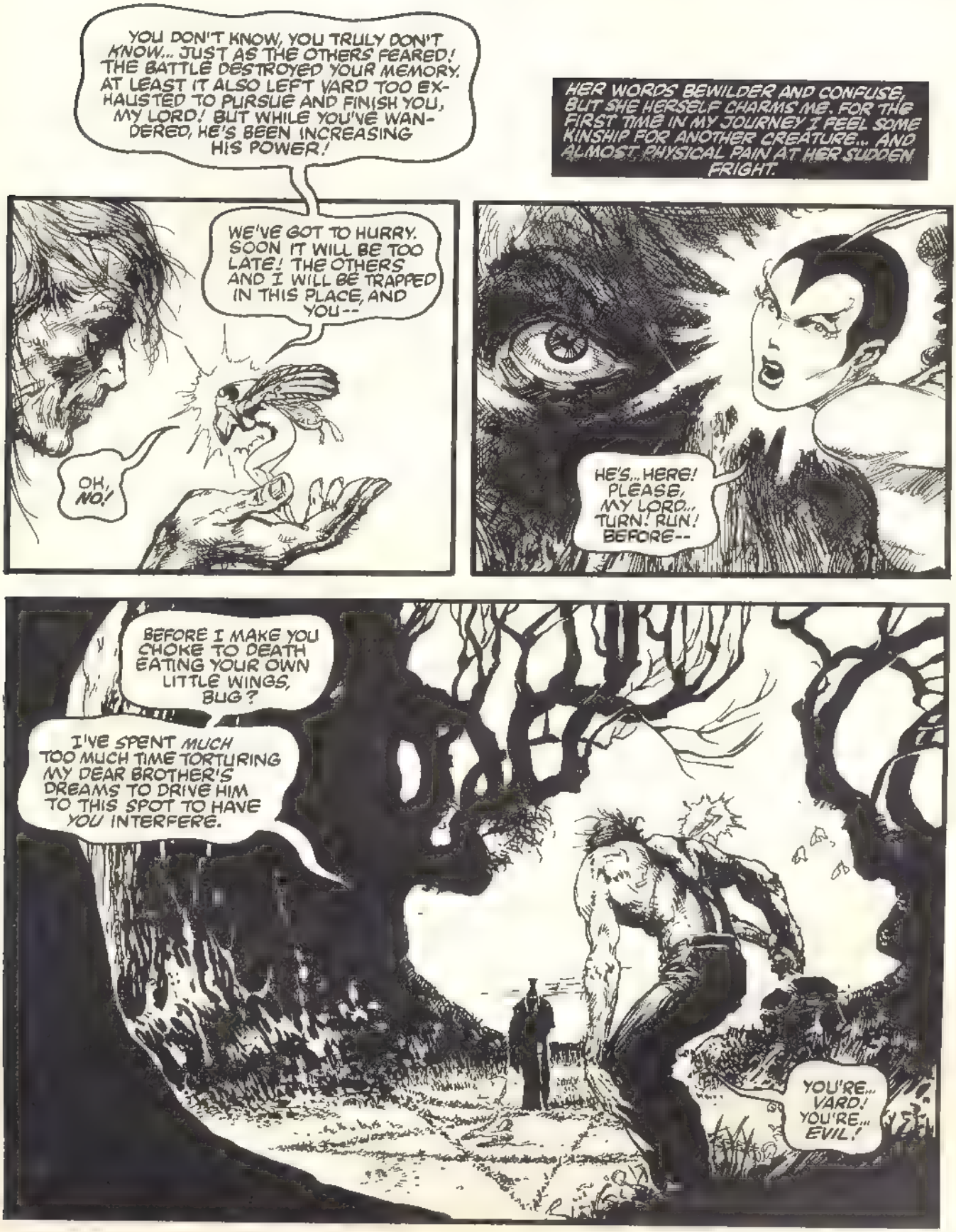
THE VOICE IS TINY, AS THOUGH COMING FROM FAR AWAY...

...YET IT IS CLEAR AND LOVELY...

...AS THE SOUNDING OF OF A FINELY-WROUGHT GLASS CHIME.
AND I CANNOT HELP BUT RUSH TO THE SOURCE..

...FROM WHICH SUCH BEAUTY COULD COME.
AT LAST...! OH, AT LAST!
WHO... ARE YOU?


YOU DON'T KNOW, YOU TRULY DON'T KNOW... JUST AS THE OTHERS FEARED! THE BATTLE DESTROYED YOUR MEMORY. AT LEAST IT ALSO LEFT VARD TOO EXHAUSTED TO PURSUE AND FINISH YOU, MY LORD! BUT WHILE YOU'VE WANDERED, HE'S BEEN INCREASING HIS POWER!
HER WORDS BEWILDER AND CONFUSE, BUT SHE HERSELF CHARMS ME. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY JOURNEY I FEEL SOME KINSHIP FOR ANOTHER CREATURE... AND ALMOST PHYSICAL PAIN AT HER SUDDEN FRIGHT.
WE'VE GOT TO HURRY. SOON IT WILL BE TOO LATE! THE OTHERS AND I WILL BE TRAPPED IN THIS PLACE, AND YOU--
OH, NO!
HE'S... HERE! PLEASE, MY LORD... TURN! RUN! BEFORE--
BEFORE I MAKE YOU CHOKE TO DEATH EATING YOUR OWN LITTLE WINGS, BUG?
I'VE SPENT MUCH TOO MUCH TIME TORTURING MY DEAR BROTHER'S DREAMS TO DRIVE HIM TO THIS SPOT TO HAVE YOU INTERFERE.
YOU'RE... VARD! YOU'RE... EVIL!

HIS VOICE IS THE MOCKING, NAGGING VOICE OF MY WORST DREAMS AND I RAGE TO STRIKE BACK AT WHAT HAS SO LONG HAUNTED ME. I CHARGE INTO THE ARENA YARD HAS DRAWN AND, AS HE PLANNED...

NO. I MERELY SUFFER AS THOUGH I'VE PERISHED. MY ENTIRE EXISTENCE SEEMS TO REND AND TEAR... TO EXPLODE APART... TO SCATTER INTO NOTHINGNESS. ALMOST. I MERELY EXPERIENCE THIS AGONY AND WISH THAT I WOULD DIE.

INSTEAD...

HE'S AWAKE NOW...! LORD HAL IS AWAKE! AND I DON'T BELIEVE HE'S HURT.

I HAVE MORE DOUBTS ABOUT THAT THAN MY CHARMING LITTLE FRIEND FROM THE SWAMP. YET THE RELIEF I HEAR IN HER TINKLING VOICE SOMEHOW LIFTS MY SPIRITS...

... AND SOMEHOW PREPARES ME FOR WHAT I SEE AS I LOOK OUT FROM THE WALL TO WHICH I'M SHACKLED. I AM IMPRISONED IN A CRUDE STONE HUT... AND I AM FAR FROM THE ONLY CAPTIVE.

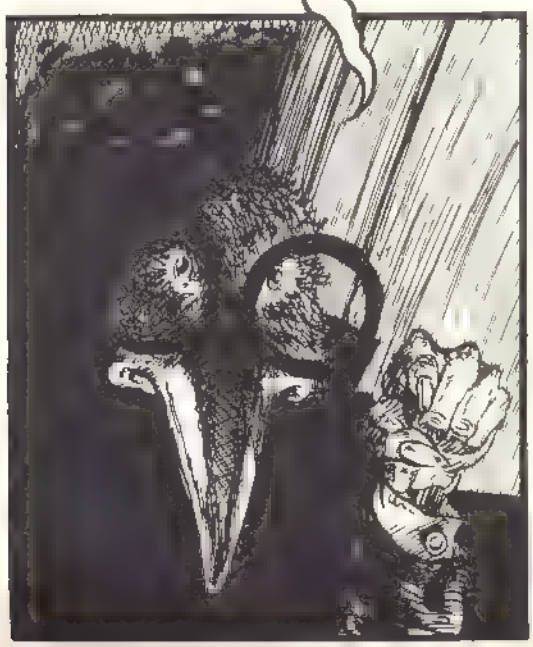
YA HEAR, FRITCH? YA HEAR WHAT LEORA SAYS, YA WORRYBEAK?! OL' VARD, HE STILL DIDN'T HAVE POWER ENOUGH T'FINISH LORD HAL! THINGS IS GONNA BE FINE!

TROOB, M'LAD, I WISH I'D BEEN GIVEN YOUR EYES... TO LOOK AT TINY BITS OF LUCK AN' SEE ENTIRE MIRACLES! UNFORTUNATELY, THAT WON'T SAVE OUR ASSES. WE'VE GOT TO PREPARE LORD HAL...

YOU'RE A WIZARD, HAL... JUST LIKE VARD. ONLY YOU WERE AROUND LONG BEFORE HIM. AN' WA-AA-AY BACK IN THOSE EARLY DAYS-- BEFORE YOU GOT TOO POWERFUL FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.. AN' OURS-- YOU CREATED US. CREATED US RIGHT OUT OF YOUR OWN LIFE ESSENCES. WE'RE PART OF YOU .. PRETTY NICE PARTS, I MIGHT ADD. PARTS THAT HAVE ENOUGH OF YOUR MEMORY TO KNOW THIS STUFF EVEN WHEN IT'S BLOCKED FROM YOU. VARD CAME LATER. HE THINKS WE'RE SOME KIND OF MAGICAL LITTLE PETS OR SOMETHING. VALUABLE ONCE HE FINDS HOW TO USE US. BUT SO FAR...

... HE'S BEEN TOO BUSY TRYING TO DESTROY YOU. COMING TO THIS WORLD-- EARTH, VARD SAYS THEY CALL IT-- MADE IT HARD FOR HIM. FEW AREAS HAVE MAGIC FOR HIM TO DRAW UPON. THIS SWAMP IS ONE SUCH PLACE. IN USING ITS MAGIC AGAINST YOU... THE SPELL HE HAD CONTAINING US WEAKENED ENOUGH FOR LEDRA TO FLY OFF TO FIND YOU. EVERYTHING ELSE, YOU KNOW. EXCEPT THE **WORST** ABOUT VARD...

FRITCH TELLS ME, AND EVEN TOLD IN HIS RASPING BIRD'S VOICE, IT MAKES MY STOMACH SWIRL HOTLY WITH FEAR. THEN HE TELLS ME WHAT WE MUST DO AND THE FEAR GROWS. UNTIL...

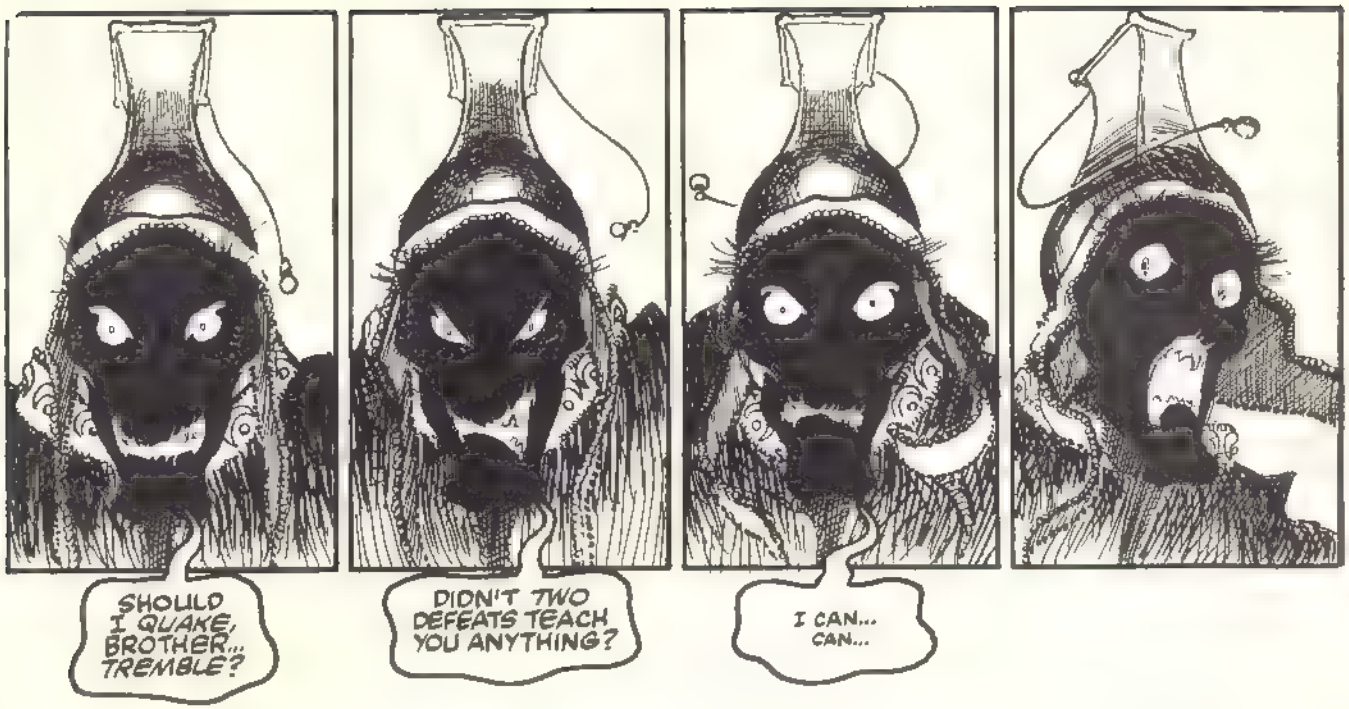


HE RADIATES POWER. HE HAS TRAVELED LONG AND FAR AND SEARCHED WELL. IF THERE IS MAGIC IN THIS TIRED, DULL WORLD HE HAS DRAWN IT TO HIM. VARD WILL NEVER BE STRONGER; NOR I WEAKER. BUT THIS TIME I HAVE KNOWLEDGE...

...AND I HAVE MY FAMILY.

ECTOPLASM, VARD! THE VERY LIFE ESSENCE FROM WHICH THEY WERE CREATED. MY LIFE ESSENCE. TO REFOCUS IT, TO STRIKE AT YOU... THEY NEED MY BEING, MY ENERGY!

WHAT'S THIS? WHAT'S THIS?



NOT WITHOUT SADNESS, I WATCH YARD DIE AS THE ECTO-FORMS FALL UPON HIM; RENDING, TEARING, RIPPING HIM APART...

...CARRYING HIM BACK TO THE **SOURCE** FROM WHICH HE SPRANG. EACH MAN'S NATURE HAS ITS DARK SIDE; IN WIZARDRY, IT TEMPTS US MORE THAN MOST. I HATED THAT PART OF ME, FEARED WHAT IT MIGHT MAKE OF ME AS MY POWERS GREW. ARROGANTLY I CALLED IT FORTH, HOPING TO PURGE MYSELF, TO DRIVE EVIL FROM ME FOREVER. INSTEAD I FOUND MY FEAR AND HATRED MADE IT STRONG, STRONG ENOUGH TO NEARLY DESTROY ME. NOW I KNOW WE CONTROL OUR DARK SIDE NOT BY SEPARATING IT FROM US, BUT BY FACING IT WITHOUT FEAR. NOW I **EMBRACE** THAT WHICH WAS VARD...

...AND ONCE MORE I AM **WHOLE.**

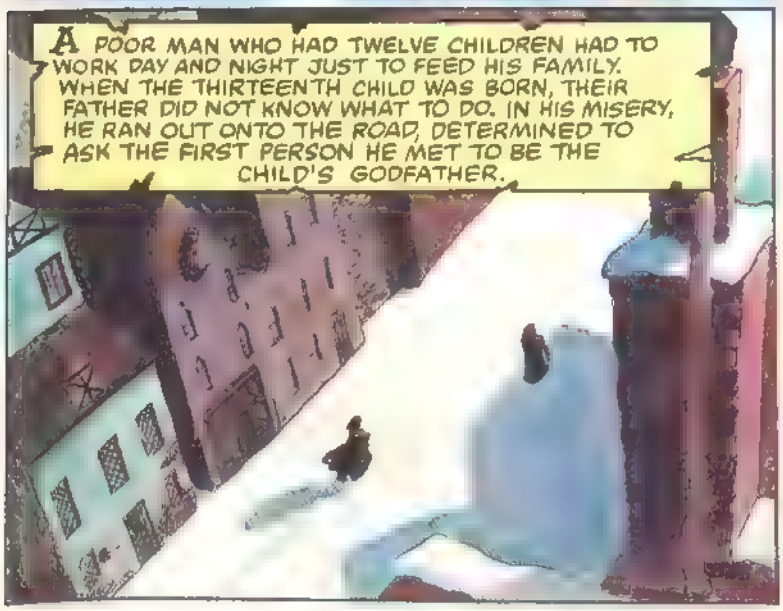
I AM LORD HALVARD, MASTER WIZARD, AGAIN. I SUMMON TO ME THE BATTLE-LOST HELM RIGHTFULLY MINE.

WITH A GESTURE, I SHATTER THE BARRIER BETWEEN THIS REALITY SO LONG MY PRISON AND ANOTHER, DEARER ONE.

AND GATHERING MY FAMILY TO ME... THIS WANDERER GOES HOME.

Godfather Death

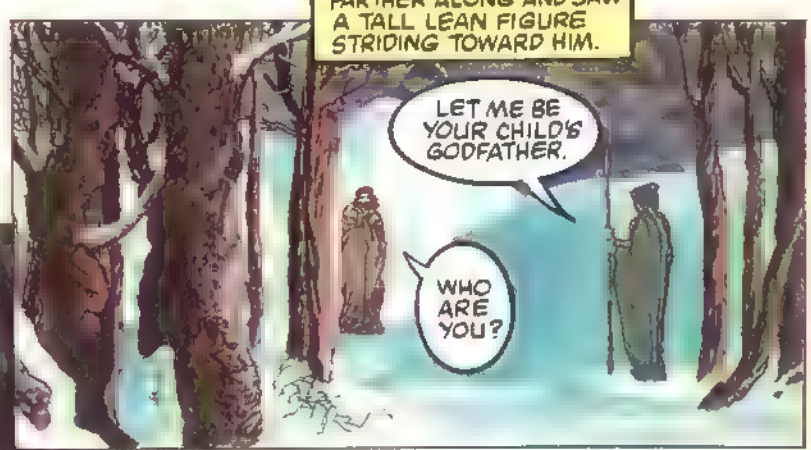
by the Brothers Grimm



art and adaptation ©1983 Scott Hampton
story by the Brothers Grimm

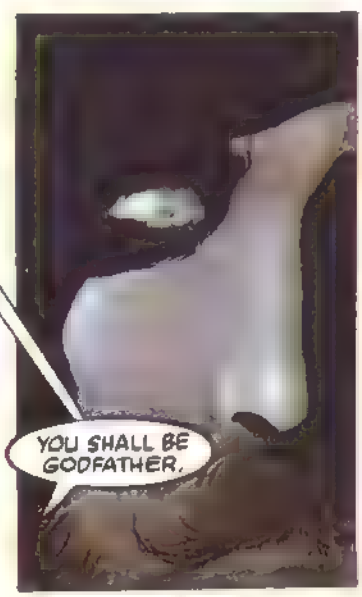
WHO ARE YOU, SIR?
I AM GOD.

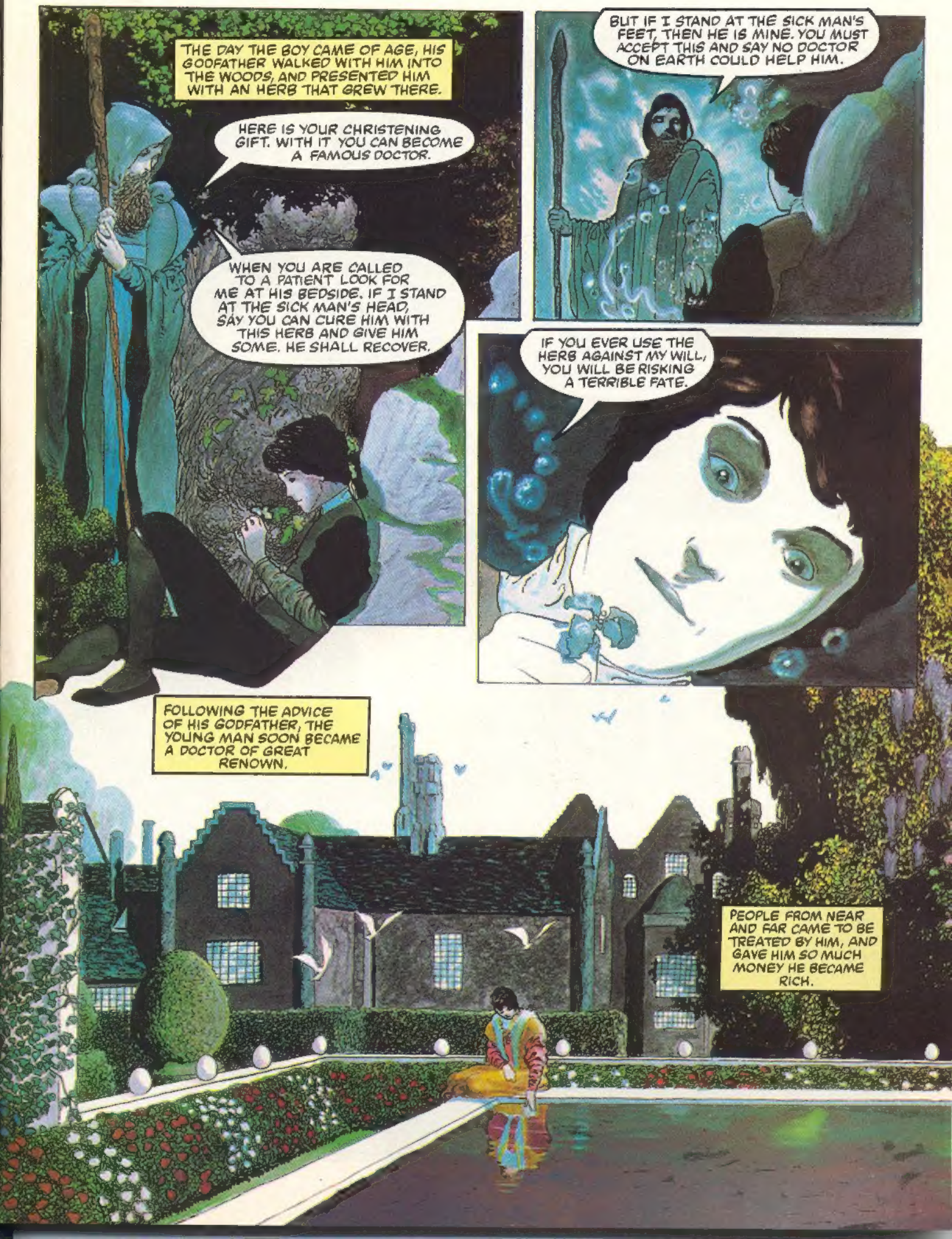
I DO NOT WANT YOU TO BE MY CHILD'S GODFATHER.
YOU LET THE RICH LIVE IN PLENTY WHILE THE POOR ARE STARVING.


THE MAN WALKED FARTHER ALONG AND SAW A TALL LEAN FIGURE STRIDING TOWARD HIM.
LET ME BE YOUR CHILD'S GODFATHER.
WHO ARE YOU?

I AM DEATH. UNDER ME, ALL MEN ARE EQUAL.

YOU MAKE NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR, SO YOU ARE THE ONE I WANT.


YOU SHALL BE GODFATHER.


THE DAY THE BOY CAME OF AGE, HIS GODFATHER WALKED WITH HIM INTO THE WOODS, AND PRESENTED HIM WITH AN HERB THAT GREW THERE.
HERE IS YOUR CHRISTENING GIFT. WITH IT YOU CAN BECOME A FAMOUS DOCTOR.
WHEN YOU ARE CALLED TO A PATIENT LOOK FOR ME AT HIS BEDSIDE. IF I STAND AT THE SICK MAN'S HEAD, SAY YOU CAN CURE HIM WITH THIS HERB AND GIVE HIM SOME. HE SHALL RECOVER.
BUT IF I STAND AT THE SICK MAN'S FEET, THEN HE IS MINE. YOU MUST ACCEPT THIS AND SAY NO DOCTOR ON EARTH COULD HELP HIM.
IF YOU EVER USE THE HERB AGAINST MY WILL, YOU WILL BE RISKING A TERRIBLE FATE.
FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF HIS GODFATHER, THE YOUNG MAN SOON BECAME A DOCTOR OF GREAT RENOWN.
PEOPLE FROM NEAR AND FAR CAME TO BE TREATED BY HIM, AND GAVE HIM SO MUCH MONEY HE BECAME RICH.

WHEN THE KING OF THE LAND FELL ILL, THE DOCTOR WAS CALLED TO SAY WHETHER OR NOT HE WOULD RECOVER.
WHEN HE CAME TO THE KING'S BEDSIDE, HE SAW DEATH AT HIS FEET AND KNEW THAT NO HERB ON EARTH COULD DO THE KING ANY GOOD.
JUST THIS ONCE, I MUST OUTWIT DEATH! I KNOW HE'LL BE ANGRY WITH ME, BUT I AM HIS GODCHILD, SO HE'S SURE TO FORGIVE ME.
AND HE LIFTED THE SICK MAN UP AND TURNED HIM AROUND, SO THAT DEATH WAS STANDING AT THE KING'S HEAD. THEN HE GAVE HIS PATIENT SOME OF THE HERB, AND THE KING BEGAN TO FEEL BETTER AT ONCE, AND RECOVERED COMPLETELY.
THEN DEATH CAME TOWARD THE DOCTOR, HIS FACE DARK WITH ANGER, AND THREATENED HIM.
I WILL FORGIVE THIS ONE TRICK ONLY BECAUSE I AM YOUR GODFATHER, BUT IF YOU EVER TRY TO CHEAT ME AGAIN, I SHALL TAKE YOU IN YOUR PATIENT'S PLACE!

NOT LONG AFTER THAT, THE KING'S ONLY CHILD FELL GRAVELY ILL. THE KING WEPT BITTERLY AS HER CONDITION WORSENED, AND HE PRONOUNCED THAT WHOEVER SHOULD SAVE THE PRINCESS WOULD MARRY HER AND INHERIT THE THRONE.

THE DOCTOR CAME TO THE PRINCESS' BEDSIDE, AND HE SAW DEATH STANDING AT HER FEET. HE SHOULD HAVE REMEMBERED HIS GODFATHER'S WARNING, BUT THE BEAUTY OF THE PRINCESS, AND THE PROSPECT OF BECOMING THE KING COMPLETELY BEDAZZLED HIM. HE DIDN'T SEE DEATH'S ANGRY LOOK, NOR HIS THREATENING GESTURES, WHEN HE LIFTED UP THE PRINCESS, AND TURNED HER AROUND, AND GAVE HER SOME OF THE HERB SO THAT THE COLOR CAME BACK TO HER CHEEKS AND SHE REVIVED.

WHICH LIFE LIGHT IS MINE?
THIS ONE.
OH, PLEASE, DEAR GODFATHER, LIGHT A NEW CANDLE FOR ME. LET ME GO ON LIVING, TO MARRY THE PRINCESS AND RULE BY HER SIDE!
THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE.
A NEW CANDLE CAN BE LIT ONLY AFTER ONE OF THE OLD ONES HAS GONE OUT.
THEN, SET THE OLD CANDLE ON TOP OF A NEW ONE THAT WILL GO ON BURNING AS THE FIRST ONE GOES OUT.
DEATH ACTED AS IF HE WOULD GRANT HIS GODCHILD'S WISH...
BUT BECAUSE HE WANTED REVENGE FOR THE TIMES THE DOCTOR HAD THWARTED HIM...
THE DOCTOR FELL, PREY TO THE ANGER OF HIS GODFATHER DEATH.